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# Narrative Identities of American Muslim Women in a Midwestern City

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Narrative Identities of American Muslim Women in a Midwestern City

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
Doctor of Philosophy in Education

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### **Abstract**

In the years since September 11, 2001, increased racial profiling changed what it means to be an Arab, and/or Muslim in the United States. While a small but growing number of studies have focused on Arab-American adolescents and identity development (Chadhury, 2008; Sarroub, 2002), few have studied those who were “emerging adults” (Arnett, 2000) at the time of the attacks, or analyzed how they construct their current lifespan narratives (McAdams, 2006) in light of the national discourse linking terrorism and Islam.

To fill this gap in the literature, my study explored the links between community discourse and narrative identity development through these specific questions: 1) How was the Arab-American Muslim population represented in local St. Louis media between 1999 and 2011? 2) How do community leaders, Muslim and non-Muslim, view the Arab-American/Muslim population in St. Louis? 3) How do American Muslim women in their 20s and 30s, who lived in the U.S. during “9/11,” narrate their lives and identities? 4) In comparison of these texts, how do the personal narratives align or dis-align with others’ discourse, and what does this mean for individuals’ emerging adulthood experiences and identity development?

This project included lifespan interviews with four local American Muslim women with family origins in Syria, Egypt, Iraq, and Turkey; and discourse analysis of nine community interviews and 66 *St. Louis Post Dispatch* opinion pieces. Using Narrative Inquiry and discourse analysis, this study wove together interviews, artifacts, research reflections, newspaper articles and field notes into multi-dimensional narratives. Analyses of interviews and newspaper articles suggest that there is still a lack of

knowledge about Muslims and their beliefs, which continues to generate fear in the community. Findings from narrative interviews with the American Muslim women demonstrate that close familial relationships and generative natures (McAdams, 2006) that developed around the time of 9-11, along with increased public interest in Islam, shaped their identity processes and helped the participants feel more empowered over time. This indicated that there is a disconnect between what was portrayed in the media, what was understood in the community, and identities formed among these four American Muslim women.



### **Acknowledgements**

Though I knew little about Dewey's work before starting my PhD, I could easily argue that it is his creed and his *Experience and Education* (1938/1997) that drove this project. I was perfectly happy with my master's degree and teaching ESL in the evenings to adults, until I heard their stories. Knowledge in and of itself was not enough for me. These stories drove me to action. It is then, really, that I have Dewey and the evening ESL students at Hazelwood West High School to thank for the origins of this project.

I still might not have taken the course of action I did without my husband, Robert Hager. I remember sitting on the couch with him one evening, trying to figure out what to do next, when I threw out the crazy idea of going back to school for my doctorate. He looked at me as if this was the most natural thing in the world, and said, "I always knew you would go back." Amazingly, his support of this idea (which I still thought at many times was a crazy one) has never faltered. When, three months after I was admitted to the doctoral program and we found out we were expecting our first child, we made plans for me to continue still. Our now three-year-old son, Tristan, has been a joy and a real trooper to put up with a mama that drags him to the occasional interview and lets me write at least on a fairly regular basis. I am grateful to both of them for supporting and encouraging me, especially in the last year and a half as this dissertation project became a reality. To my mom and dad who have encouraged me along the way, I am very thankful. I am thankful especially for my dad who had been through this process less than a decade ago himself, and provided insight in moments I needed it most.

I remember the moment I met Dr. Dorner. I was invited to a talk she was giving on language brokering through the Literacy for Social Justice organization at UMSL. As I

sit here trying to write about the last four years with her as an advisor, however, I'm finding it hard to put into words how much the experience has helped me to grow and has challenged me in ways I didn't expect. Working in a language school, taking field notes at meetings and community events, conducting some of my first interviews and transcribing, participating in research team meetings and feeling like a valued member of a group, having opportunities to speak about our work from St. Louis to Denver, New Orleans, Vancouver, and places in between, publishing (and struggling to publish) within our research group, and quite a few talks over coffee: these experiences I owe to Dr. Lisa Dorner. Though my interest in Muslim studies was not one we shared, she continually encouraged me and helped me connect with other resources; I do not think that I would have ever reached this point in my studies without her. To other members of my committee: Dr. Rebecca Rogers, Dr. Alina Slapac, Dr. Joel Jennings and Rehana Shafi, I am grateful for guidance, wisdom, and feedback throughout this process. Each provides expertise in an area I could not have done without.

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To my interviewees, and especially to the four "core" participants, I am grateful for their openness, their trust, and their powerful words and stories. I like to think that

without them, I would have nothing worthwhile to say in these pages. Their stories not only tell their lives, but also give new life to others.

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## **I Introduction to Narrative Identities of American Muslim Women in a Midwestern City**

What does it mean to identify as “Muslim” in the United States today? While there are no official numbers available, as the national census and Immigration and Naturalization Service do not collect data on religious affiliation, (Haddad, 2011), Hacking (2010) estimates through Census Bureau survey data that there are approximately 1.5 million Muslims over the age of 18 in the United States today, and 850,000 under 18, constituting roughly 0.6% of the total population. A study conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2007 found Muslims in the United States denounce Islamic extremism even more so than Muslim minorities in Western European nations, believe in the American work ethic (71%), and are very pleased with their communities (72%). However, despite these similarities to the larger population, a majority (53%) also find life in the United States more difficult since 9/11. This may have something to do with the negative national discourse surrounding the “War on Terror” and racial profiling prevalent since 9/11: while 80% of Americans believed racial profiling was wrong before 9/11, 60% now favor racial profiling now “as long as it [is] directed towards Arabs and Muslims” (Maira, 2004). It may also relate to Muslims’ migration and immigration experience, as over two thirds (65%) of Muslims are foreign born, with a large portion coming from Arabic-speaking countries and regions generally incorporated in what is perceived as the “Middle East” (“Muslim Americans: Middle class,” 2007).

### **The Study: Questions of Context, Place, Time, and Events**

In this research project, I began with the question: What happens when the tumultuous period of identity development in adolescence and “emerging adulthood” collide with a cultural period in which the wider society begins to view you and/or the group with which you identify as negative and dangerous? The conceptualization of racial and religious identities is complex, relying heavily not only on how individuals perceive themselves, but also on the rhetoric that surrounds a particular group in the media, in their larger communities, and also within the racial and ethnic communities in which they, themselves, live. This is made even more complex when particular racial and religious identities intersect, as is the case with Arab-American or Middle Eastern-American Muslims.

The experience of Arab-American Muslims is one that drew my attention, especially in the wake of “9/11.” In the following pages, I first explain how I became interested in these issues and developed this project, before explaining in detail the study’s (1) specific research questions; (2) theoretical framework and background literature; (3) data collection procedures; (4) data analysis procedures; and (5) significance and implications, especially for educational practices and policies.

### **Interfaith Dialogue: My Own Story in Brief**

My interest in the Arab-American Muslim experience stemmed from my own identity development, emerging adulthood experiences, and the individuals I met in the last fifteen years. As the daughter of a minister, whose father and grandfather and great-grandfathers had all been Christian ministers, my entire childhood and family history has been deeply steeped in religious identity and practices. In my early teen

years, my father made a career change and moved into teaching religion at a Midwestern college. As part of the introductory course for freshmen, my father would take students to a number of houses of worship of other faiths in Chicago, and I would go on the occasional weekend; it was on one of these trips that I was first introduced to Islam and the interfaith dialogue between Christians and Muslims. As a white woman from the middle class, living in a small farming town, these perspectives seemed so different. As I listened, I soon enough realized that our values and ethics were very similar, though our theology differed.

Such learning and dialogue continued into my own emerging adulthood. In the fall of 2004 as I entered my master's program at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, I met a classmate by the name of Aybek\* who was from Uzbekistan. Aybek was a fellow ESL teacher and spent much of our two years in the program trying to change perceptions about his homeland, his religion and his worldview simply by being himself and answering questions. I met other young Muslim students during this time, all of whom worked hard to combat the images of Islam and terrorism that were being broadcast onto American television screens nightly. It was during this year that the school newspaper reprinted a cartoon out of the New York Times depicting Muhammad, something a Muslim considers blasphemous. The conversation generated by this event was enlightening for many of us outside of the Islamic faith and cultural community.

In the fall of 2006, I made the decision to work for a non-profit organization in St. Louis, teaching ESL in the evenings to adults. I was offered several areas of the

---

\* A pseudonym, as are all names in this dissertation

city, and the office personnel seemed shocked when I chose to teach in one of the poorer and most racially divided regions, North St. Louis County, which was near my apartment. Overall, the organization had a clientele of English learners primarily from Eastern Europe and Western Asia, but the site I had chosen represented a very different population: approximately 50% Hispanic and 50% Arab-American Muslim.

It was here that I truly began to understand how 9/11 had shaped the everyday lives of those who were Arab immigrants and those who were professed Muslims. For the most part, those who attended my class were stay-at-home moms who were active in the lives of their mosques and their children's schools. They were interested in making friends with neighbors, joining the PTA, and in many cases, going back to school to train for jobs in service professions like teaching and social work. They were kind, articulate, and interested in reaching out in their communities. However, people in their communities did not receive them in the ways they desired.

One night, one of my students, Mana, said to me, "Teacher, how do you make small talk with your neighbors?" After I told her about talking to them about weather, sports, kids, bringing over cookies, and other such general topics, she said that she had taken cookies to her neighbors, and they slammed the door in her face. I was stunned. Perhaps it was something she wasn't telling me. I asked the others in the class what they would do in that situation. That's when I discovered that she wasn't alone in her story. Alima told of visiting a bank in Milwaukee in her hijab and being accosted by a man behind her, saying, "I hate you because my son is fighting over in your country and our boys are dying." He'd assumed she was Iraqi when nothing was further from the truth; she and her family were Palestinians and had fled from another scene of

violence. Tibah, who was Iraqi, had even more frightening stories: being spit on, neighbors taking their kids inside when hers came outside to play, and further isolation.

While I'd expected this in my small town in Southern Illinois, I'd never expected these experiences to be so prevalent in bigger cities in the Midwest. When I knew what to look for, though, it was astonishing to me how many negative images were there. Until then, I'd simply not noticed all the negative stereotyping against Arab-Americans or Muslims. It was at this point that I began to take notice of what was on television and the rhetoric of the people around me. When I started graduate school again, this time for doctoral work, I began to question how such rhetoric affected individuals growing up and developing their own identities in the midst of such images and discourse.

### **Purpose of Study and Research Questions**

As Tehranian (2009) states, "The development of a Middle Eastern racial identity is not exactly a top-down process, contrary to what the racial-prerequisite cases and the selective racialization process might initially suggest" (p.74). This construction of race categorizations and their social meanings are the result of complex negotiations spread over time and various places, not imposed by a particular government law, policy, or the greater public ruling, but negotiated in a more private sector through the everyday conduct of individuals. Identity, for example, is negotiated through stories and the telling of one's life (Gee, 1991, 2000; Wortham, 2000). Immigrant adolescents may be more likely to experience negative social and psychological outcomes connected to acculturation when one's 'story' is vastly different from the mainstream, or when there is great cultural distance between the "native" and immigrant ethnic

minority groups, widespread discrimination, and vast socioeconomic variation where youth are visibly different (Berry, 1997). These factors are especially salient for young Muslim immigrants in Western cultures, where they are in political and social situations in which they are defined as a minority based on both their ethnicity and their religion (Stuart, 2010; Tehranian, 2009).

While a growing number of studies have focused on Muslim adolescents negotiating this process of identity development (Chadhury, 2008; Maira, 2004; Sarroub, 2002; Sirin & Fine, 2008) few, if any, have looked at the experiences of “emerging adults.” Arnett (2000) defines emerging adulthood as a period or stage unique to recent history, as late adolescents are experiencing freedom from adult responsibilities, and engaging in an extended period of identity development, sometimes into their late twenties and early thirties. In exploring how adults narrate their lives and identity development (McAdams, 2006; Wortham, 2000), one can see how they position themselves with or against the larger discourse of power surrounding them (Fairclough, 1993). This, in turn, tells us something new and potentially important about how wider societal discourse, especially that which is negative, may shape an individual.

My purpose in this study is to explore the experiences and narrative identity development of women perceived as of Middle Eastern descent who identify as Muslims. Not only is this a growing population, but a population with a unique experience, as they have been marginalized by the actions of a few associated with this particular racial and religious group. Beyond this, few studies have focused on “new immigrant gateways” (Massey, 2010) in general, and little if any research has focused

upon this particular immigrant group in St. Louis. Following the traditions of Clandinin & Connelly (2000) in *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research*, I depict and co-construct with participants several stories that would have otherwise gone untold, especially as stories of everyday lived experiences are not told in the mass media. With this in mind, my research explores the following questions: 1) How was the Arab-American Muslim population represented in local St. Louis media between 1999 and 2011? 2) How do community leaders, Muslim and non-Muslim, view the Arab-American population in St. Louis? 3) How do Arab-American Muslim women in their 20s and 30s, who lived in the U.S. during “9/11,” narrate their lives and identities? 4) In comparison of these texts, how do the personal narratives align or dis-align with others’ discourse, and what does this mean for individuals’ emerging adulthood experiences and identity development?

### **Framing the Study**

Narratives are one of the oldest vehicles for education, as orators passed down stories and histories, traditions and cultures from generation to generation long before written language was widely available. In current times, we use stories to communicate, to make sense of our lives and our world as well as share in experiences together. Telling stories about the lives and experiences of ordinary people allows us to listen to voices often marginalized or quieted within the larger discourses of society (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Langellier, 1989). One such quieted voice is that of immigrants in our society, those who speak a different language, perhaps dress differently, have different traditions, and have come to live in the United States but have not completely assimilated into the culture. Often, over a generation or two, they incorporate the

United States stories into their own, taking on many American traditions while holding on to some aspects of their heritage (Berry, 1997). Despite this, for most in U.S. society, little is taught about those who are outside the “norm,” and this void is frequently filled by assumptions and prejudice. I offer here a critique of some such assumptions, followed by research into how individuals navigate identity development and the telling of their own stories, as well as how these stories help shape their past, present and even future (Wortham, 2000). Thus, research and theories from three areas, described below, frame this study: (1) the experiences of Arab-Americans and Muslims in the United States, (2) identity development, and (3) narrative inquiry.

### **Background Literature**

Arab-American immigrants currently face numerous stereotypes. For instance, over 60% of Arab-Americans identify as Coptic Christians, but persons from this region are associated primarily with Islam in Western thought (Tehrani, 2009). This synthetic homogeneity covers a vast multitude of linguistic, cultural and historical differences of which many Americans remain ignorant. This seems to have occurred in part as Americans have come to understand over-simplified notions of a “Middle East,” a mythical alliance of nations shaped within Western thought that denotes not a geographical region or even a linguistic region, but some argue relates to the presence of crude oil (Tehrani, 2009).

In their book, *Fueling our Fears: Stereotyping, Media Coverage, and Public Opinion of Muslim Americans*, Nacos and Torres-Reyna (2007) state that there has been little done, even by those whose job it is to report on the Arab and Islamic world, to understand and explain it. In fact, in the year directly following the terrorist attacks on



September 11, 2001, the number of hate crimes against Arab-Americans was seventeen times what it was the year previously (FBI, 2002, as cited in Sirin & Fine, 2008). In general, Muslims and Arabs have been written and spoken about in the news as either suppliers of oil or as potential terrorists. Even those reporters who are paid to illuminate such things pay little attention to the humanity and passion of Arabs and Muslims, and the complexity of their identities (Nacos and Torres-Reyna, 2007). However, unlike academic research, a few mass media articles (e.g., Burleigh, 2010; Dine, 2010) have highlighted the moves Arab or “Middle Eastern” immigrants have made to the Midwest or other “new immigrant gateways” (Waters and Jimenez, 2005).

While the news media has not fully explored what it means to be Arab-American or Muslim, a small but growing number of ethnic, cultural and religious studies have explored the experiences of high school students directly following the 9/11 attacks (Bayoumi, 2008; Sirin & Fine, 2008), with a few focusing specifically on the intersection of religion, gendered expectations, and identity development (Chadhury, 2008; Sarroub, 2002). Sirin & Fine (2008) and Bayoumi (2008) found that the treatment of Arab-American Muslims and attitudes towards them post-9/11 varied greatly even within the same community; some participants found support from other immigrant groups and neighbors, and others were detained and questioned for months at a time by homeland security without ever being charged or allowed to ask questions. Sarroub (2002) and Chadhury (2008) found some similarities in how Arab-American Muslim youth responded to stereotypes, national discourse, and events. Arab-American Muslim teenagers in these two studies (Chadhury, 2008; Sarroub, 2002) did

not seek assimilation within the larger community but wished to stand apart from the larger society and find solidarity in their communities.

As Sarroub (2002) stated, one does not chose their ethnicity, but individuals do chose religious practices which, for Muslims, is often a sort of “ setting apart” or distancing from the larger society. This negotiation of being Arab and/or Middle Eastern and American, Muslim in a non-Muslim country, English-speaking children of parents who might struggle with the U.S. language and culture, and acting in adult roles while still trying to explore identity in adolescence, is extremely nuanced. Sarroub’s (2002) research indicated that for most of the high school girls in her study, negotiating their identities often meant living “in-between-ness,” where they were neither fully American nor Arab. In exploring the ways that adolescent immigrant Muslim girls told their identities and negotiated literacy, U.S. society and pressures from both schools and parents, Sarroub (2002) and Chadhury (2008) found that their participants walked somewhere between two sets of expectations, not disappointing any, but also not receiving full approval from anyone. What Sarroub (2002) and Chadhury (2008) do not address, and I seek to examine in the proposed study, is how the Arab-American Muslim community was represented in the media and how this was “mirrored” (or not) in the participants’ stories, or their narrated selves in relationship with others (Craig & Huber, 2007). Research has also neglected to examine the narrative identity development of Arab or Middle-Eastern American Muslim emerging adults, a gap which this study fills.

## **Identity Development in Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood**

During the process of identity development in adolescence, developmental social-psychologist, Erik Erikson (1959) reminds us that children put behind their childhoods. Towards the end of this phase, individuals no longer “play” with roles, but encounter an identity crisis and are forced to make decisions, enacting identities that will become irreversible patterns for the rest of their lives. Today, in many developed nations, the increasing amount of time spent between high school and marriage is creating opportunity for identity development and self-searching to extend well beyond the typical “adolescent” time frame, and even into one’s later twenties and thirties. This extended period of freedom from familial responsibilities (for some youth) and identity development has been termed “emerging adulthood” (Arnett, 2000). While Erikson (1959) concedes that adolescence is an “abnormal” time with much upheaval occurring (p. 125), Arnett (2000) argues that much the same is true of emerging adulthood periods.

The use of adult narratives to review identity development is growing in popularity (McAdams, 2006; Wortham, 2000) and re-conceptualizes how we think about identities. Analyzing adult narratives also allows one to uncover the importance of interconnectivity between individual development, relationship dynamics, and group membership at various levels of the micro and macro systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1995; Deutsch, 2008). Historically, theories of development focused on expected milestones within a time frame or age range, such as the language capabilities of a 2-year-old child. However, within recent years there have been some shifts away from the focus on “stages” and towards research that considers the ways in which membership and

participation in social contexts shapes the values, attitudes and identities of individuals through interaction; that is, the concentric circles of influence act not only upon the individual, but inevitably upon each other (Deutsch, 2008).

### **Ecological Identity Development**

In a complex multidisciplinary approach, Bronfenbrenner (1995) argues that development over the course of one's life is bi-directional, where individuals are both shaped by people and institutions in their ecology, and responsible for shaping these same persons and institutions, at both micro (individual and often internal) and macro (community, societal and sometimes global) levels within the system.

This multi-level identity development can be investigated through four elements in intersection: process, person, context and time (Bronfenbrenner, 1995). This is to say that there are important relationships between physical space/place, historical context, and who a person is (their identity). Hansfield (2010) makes similar claims, arguing that development occurs differently over different times and spaces. While Bakhtin suggested protagonists in novels move and organize themselves differently in different spaces and times, Hansfield (2010) and others (e.g., Lefebvre, 1991; McAdams, 2006) have extended this to the identity of living individuals. In other words, though a life is lived linearly, identity is not told as such; rather, it is often pieced together and understood through less linear and more storied paths. For example, Katz and Monk (1993) have shown that the lived experiences of parents, grandparents, and great grandparents shape not only their own identities, but also the lives and experiences of other generations through struggle, especially as women have carved out new spaces and new roles for themselves in a society that sought to confine them.

**Identity and Changing Contexts.** Likewise, Stuart Hall (1996) asserts that identity development is multi-dimensional and complex, stating that identities evolve and change, and it is not something easily summed up in a few sentences. Its existence does not unfold its “true” form over time, nor is it simply something hidden and easily essentialized and shared by those of similar histories and family backgrounds.

Identities, simply put, are not simple. They are never a united monolithic part of us, and are developed out of sometimes intersecting or antagonistic discourse practice and positioning. Hall (1996) argues that identities are not “who we are” or “where we came from,” but who we are becoming. Identity, then, is best constructed and understood in the moment as we look back on what has occurred thus far. It is understood, then, that this represents only a moment and place in time and society, and an individual will most likely understand and approach their identity differently in the near future.

One element that greatly shapes individuals is migratory movement, as both the values of the society and place of habitation shift. For those who are first or second generation immigrants in the United States, the discussion of ethnic identity—or identities—is one that is even more difficult to navigate, often leaving the individual to feel part of both cultures, and neither culture at the same time as they live in the “in-between” that they articulate (Sarroub, 2002). This lived tension is played out in the identities of such individuals.

**Identity and Racial Contexts.** I would like to move specifically to the experiences of one particular group, in American society: Arab or Middle Eastern-American Muslims. The cultural practices of ‘Arabs’ and the religious practices of Muslims have been racialized, or differentiated into a racial context. This has been

accomplished through particular discourse and portrayed as harmful to the dominant culture group (Blackledge, 2003). Philosopher Charles Taylor (1994) argues that we have created first class and second-class citizens in the public sphere. He states that identities are partly shaped by how one is recognized by others, and individuals and groups “suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirrors back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves”(1994, p.25). Tehranian (2009) argues that this has occurred since the first ‘Arabs’ arrived from Syria in the United States in the early 1900s. While historically the American courts have considered those from of the Middle East as “white” and encouraged individuals to blend into the fabric of society (Boosahda, 2003), this changed following the events of September 11, 2001. Today, with the racial profiling laws in reaction to 9/11, one could easily argue that we have gone well beyond this “contemptible” image; those with darker skin and facial hair are pulled aside for additional screening at airports or wrongfully imprisoned for looking “suspicious” (Bayoumi, 2003), or fitting with a particular of terrorism or violence.

In sum, individuals often begin to understand their identities through ways that others view and talk about them in public discourse. However, identities grow and change well beyond these parameters, especially if the discourse they hear is confining. Individuals are not merely a product of a cultural or religious identity that is stagnant, either. In order to better understand this, each must be seen as within a process, in an individual, occurring within a particular physical space and during a point in time or historical context. This set of complexities is addressed within this research.

## **Narrative Inquiry**

One very powerful way to analyze (and counteract) these ascribed images and presumed identities is through the use of narrative inquiry. Langellier (1989) argues that personal narratives and the study of them within academic research is rich with information, often spanning the gap between the privileged mainstream and the marginalized; but sometimes research of personal narratives is lacking in clear direction. However, I align my work with that of Clandinin & Connelly (2000) and Clandinin (2007), arguing that personal narratives and co-construction of narratives and shared experiences can be one of the richest texts to explore. To demonstrate the direction this project will take, I answer three questions from the Langellier (1989) study, which examined prior research by asking: 1) What are the object and unit of analysis (or what is meant by narrative and its function in any particular study)? 2) What are significant concepts for understanding personal narrative? and 3) How is the context defined? Specifically, how does the narrative function in relation to its ability to communicate, to perform and to be interpreted? Using Langellier's (1989) model, the following sections explain my answers to these three key questions.

**1. Defining Narrative and its Function.** Based upon the above review and drawing from Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and Clandinin (2007), I contend that personal narratives are multi-dimensional; they draw on the past, are reflected upon in the present, are given meaning in relation to future events, and are “always located somewhere along the dimensions of time, place, the personal, and the social” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 144). Personal narrative is the telling of oneself; it is life as narrative (Bruner, 2004) and it is, in essence a telling of not only who we are, but

also who we are becoming and hope to be. It is rarely linear, but rather reliant upon kernel stories (Langellier, 1989), which are continuously developing stories told via episodic memories (McAdams, 2006). McAdams (2006) states that episodic memory allows us to travel backward in our own remembered time and to connect what we remember to what we believe will be significant in the future, a sort of connecting our past to our hopes. The episodic memory lays a foundation for our experienced lives (autobiography) and how we see ourselves (identity), or for our narrative interpretation of self-in-time.

**2. Significant Concepts.** Based upon the conceptualizations above and prior work, there are a number of significant concepts necessary for understanding the personal narratives of Arab-American Muslim women: (1) reflexivity, (2) voice and counter-narrative, (3) race, and (4) timelessness, sequencing and genre.

***Reflexivity.*** Often personal narratives are seen as problematic in terms of reliability. Bruner (2004) indicates that narrative, and especially personal and “autobiographical” narratives, are very shaky in their connections to “truth” as they are easily swayed by cultural, relational and linguistic influences. However, Bruner also argues, the narrators become the stories they tell, and in these re-tellings that rely upon reflexivity individuals may not give perfectly “truthful” accounts, but tell stories about what we hope to be or see; they are something we strive towards. Reflexivity for the purpose of this study is defined as the ability of a researcher to turn the focus inward and to critique their own practices, beliefs and approaches, as illustrated in the works of Sarroub (2002). Reflexivity in our stories helps us to frame the past with both the present and the hoped-for future in mind, giving an account of the way we see



ourselves and projecting an identity that we wish to convey. The intended audience of these narrative identities, then, matters greatly. Whether consciously or unconsciously, the researcher seeks to shape the listener in new ways as they challenge misinformation, misunderstandings and stereotypes encountered in wider discourses and within the narratives they engage.

***Voice and Counter-Narrative.*** Stories are told from our perspective, in reflection of what has been and what we hope will be, but we also tell stories because they vary from the cultural cannon available to us (Bruner, 2004). That is to say that when we do not hear our story in among the cannon of characters available, we share our own accounts, providing a new character in the canon, so to speak—one that is a voice not heard before or even providing a sort of voice of dissent against already present models—and this is why historical contexts matters a great deal (Bruner, 2004). Voice, counter-narrative and complex histories have often converged around the context of race, especially in the U.S.

***Race.*** The idea of race is convoluted, and the easiest place to start is by acknowledging that it is socially constructed (Frankenberg, 1993), often used to subjugate some while giving a small group structural advantage. Here in the United States, the racial group in power is those perceived to be white, whose advantage often goes unnamed and cultural practices are seen as ‘normal’ and go unnamed (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 1). As stated by my friend, Rehana Shafi, who is director of the Dar al Islam Teachers’ Institute and Assistant Director of the Sherman Teacher Education Scholars Program at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County:

I have [often] referred to myself as "brown." At first it was because I enjoyed seeing people's reactions, whether they be amused or a bit uncomfortable - it was my way of raising an issue that we are taught to not talk about. One of my (college) students used to call me "Queen Brown" -- I loved that! In any case, it is my way of pointing out how one way we define humans is by the apparent color of their skin, which seems so shallow. If only it could be that simple [Personal Correspondence].

Race, as addressed within this study's analysis and though narrative inquiry is a key element in how someone tells their identity, especially for those who are "Middle Eastern," and "Arab," those perceived as "Middle Eastern" and "Arab" but are not, and even those not perceived as "Middle Eastern" and identify as such. In a post-9/11 society with increased racial profiling, perceived race has become even more important to understanding societal treatment of individuals and their response to such treatment.

Ngo (2010), in her work *Unresolved Identities*, states that European Americans in a position of power have created an epistemology in which other groups have been essentialized and portrayed as a monolithic whole, showing little variation and are without contradiction and change. She argues, however, that when one takes time to examine individual narratives, there is contradiction and change over time even in one 'history' and that there are great variations between experiences, lives, and discourses. More importantly, as illustrated by Hansfield (2010) in dealing with identity development, identities that one

articulates and a feeling of one's 'place' depend greatly on context—the time and place in which they occur.

*Timelessness, Sequencing and Genre.* In approaching personal narratives from a literary standpoint, Bruner (2004) states that there are 3 aspects to a story: timelessness, sequencing and genre. Timelessness requires a connection to morals or themes that are universal and not confined to any one culture, context, or language. Meaning-making, therefore, is one of the most essential aspects to personal narratives, allowing them to transcend beyond the time and space in which they are told, and provide insight into human nature (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Sequencing our stories tells us something about the ways in which we present ideas. As Bruner (2004) states, “This particularity of time, place, person, and event is also reflected in the mode of the telling, in the discourse properties of the [sequencing]” (p. 696). This perspective brings narrative inquiry in alignment with Brofenbrenner's (1995) developmental model, and its focus on process, person, time, and context. There is an order (often thematic, according to McAdams, 2006), and not solely linear; making meaning-making via thematic understanding is much more important. Genre, then, is the category into which a story is placed.

Specifically, we must focus not on the story as a whole initially, but on the kernel story. Kernel stories are story within a story that tells something important about how a narrator's values developed or how an individual came to reflect upon and categorize experiences. The segmentation of these stories are often marked through use of back channeling (a listener check such as “you know?” or “right?”) or through vocally trailing off mid-sentence, while the beginnings and endings of kernel stories bound by a

specific time or event. Appendix I displays for readers the kernels observed within the interview texts, giving titles and transcript line numbers for each. Some transcript lines are unaccounted for within the narratives, as they related to ideas unbound by events or engage in aside conversation about related topics.

In many cases, the narrator often gives their age at the time of an event or a calendar year as a point of reference within the kernel story. As developmental periods were important in the framing of these stories, I have also included these age references in Appendix I, where possible. While the overarching genre of the narratives presented here is “life story,” there are kernels that relate specifically to love, family, challenges, hardship, faith, success and many more. Each of these genres and how the individual processes them are important to understanding the whole story and each kernel. Themes are determined by identifying the central actor in each kernel (the narrators themselves, a parent, a co-worker, teacher, or other individual) and the perceived impact of this event (building misunderstanding, trust, identity or generativity). Categories are sometimes conflated to make comparisons across life narratives and provide a timeless truth.

**3. *Defining Context.*** Returning again to Langellier’s (1989) approach, one final question remains—how is context defined, and how, specifically, does it define the function of the narrative in relation to communication, performance and interpretation? Combining McAdams’ (2006), Bruner (2004), and Clandinin & Connelly’s (2000) approaches to narrative, I believe that narrative functions to form and shape identity, communicate values, and interpret the meaning of lived experiences. McAdams (2006) states that shaping, communicating and interpreting

personal narratives is much like ordering at a restaurant—we chose our individual narratives from competing stories, and shape them to fit our social, economic and political world. These, in turn, are shaped by family history, educational experiences and our personalities. That is to say that our culture and our formulation of self must struggle with each other and “come to terms” in the telling of our narratives (2006, p. 289). This is why narrative is so powerful in the development of identity, as it is both a telling of who we are and a shaping of who we are in the process; narrative inquiry is a way of living (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Craig & Huber, 2007). This is also why, in a study of narratives and identity, I believe that it likewise important to study context through an examination of rhetorical representations in local discourse: What are the other discourses within one’s time and place, with which one must contend as one develops her own narrative/identity?

## **Methods**

To better understand the ways in which emerging adult Arab-American Muslim Women narrate their identities in relation to or against the rhetoric surrounding 9/11, this research study explored: 1) How was the Arab-American Muslim population represented in local St. Louis media between 1999 and 2011? 2) How do community leaders, Muslim and non-Muslim, view the Arab-American population in St. Louis? 3) How do Arab-American Muslim women in their 20s and 30s, who lived in the U.S. during “9/11,” narrate their lives and identities? 4) In comparison of these texts, how do the personal narratives align or dis-align with others’ discourse, and what does this mean for individuals’ emerging adulthood experiences and identity development?

In the following sections, I will 1) briefly outline the general research design of this project, 2) explain the previous pilot study and how it has shaped the questions and methods within this study, 3) describe data collection procedures, 4) explain data analysis procedures, including important ethical considerations particular to narrative inquiry, and 5) articulate issues of trustworthiness and transferability from within this study.

### **Research Design**

Due to the descriptive and analytical nature of the research questions, this study utilized a narrative analysis approach, rooted both in Narrative Inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1993; Gee, 2005). It involved analysis of collected data: sample newspaper articles from the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, as well as a weaving together of personal narratives and artifacts co-constructed and written with 4 “core” participants, as well as 9 community member and leader interviews. In addition to analysis of data from outside sources, I maintained reflections and field notes to create a multi-dimensional narrative, which accounted for multiple perspectives, including my own.

**Pilot Study Findings.** During the spring of 2009, I began an oral history project to acquire the stories of individuals in the area who identified as Arab and Muslim. At the time, I was interested in trying to show that 9/11 had a negative impact upon Arab-American Muslims and I wanted to document the mistreatment of individuals. My interview questions probed about school experiences at different stages (elementary, middle, secondary, college and into first years in their career) and focused especially on pre and post-9/11 interactions with the larger society. In the early

summer of 2009, I conducted my first interview, asking one Egyptian participant how 9/11 impacted her life. A second interview was conducted in the fall of 2010 with a participant of Turkish and American descent. I digitally recorded and then transcribed both of these semi-structured interviews. The first audio recording was 40 minutes and 24 seconds long, and followed a more structured and interviewer-guided protocol. The second audio recording was 58 minutes long, and followed a slightly more open protocol with a number of probing questions as follow-ups to previous answers.

Upon the conclusion of these interviews, initial findings led to changes in (1) the design of the study reported here, in particular the (1) participant selection, (2) research questions and (3) interview protocol. First, for those I had interviewed, September 11, 2001, was of some importance, but not in the ways I'd originally assumed. As I began the study, I had believed that 9/11 had negatively impacted the identities and experiences of many Muslims, serving as a kind of focal point. However, as I began talking with participants, I discovered that they did not view 9/11 in such stark terms, and most felt that events preceding and following that one were also quintessential in their ethnic and religious identity development. Thus, my original assumption that the events of 9/11 would serve as the primary and/or sole catalyst in their identity development was shown to be incorrect, and so a wider lens as needed for this project: a life history approach.

After deciding upon a life history approach, I chose to work with women only within a particular age range: 23-35. I was aware that the personal nature of the interview could be perceived a certain way within the Arab/Middle Eastern/Muslim community. As discussed below, it was advisable for me, as a woman, to interview

women only. In addition I added the age range as selection criteria. Although the selection of two women in their late 20s was originally incidental, choosing this age range became purposeful. After talking with several slightly older Muslim women and several younger women, it seemed that the events on September 11, 2001, mattered less in the shaping of their identities and their stories. However, for those who were adolescents in 2001, 9/11 seemed to play a role (though smaller than anticipated) in the shaping and telling of their identities. For others, it may have been an inconvenience, but it did not change the way they dressed or the way they talked about their ethnic and/or religious identities. However, the two women I spoke with in their late 20s were eager to talk about ways in which this event and time period had shaped them.

Both interviews also led to adaptations of the original protocol, changing questions to more open-ended and life history oriented, with several probes towards educational experiences during adolescence and emerging adulthood (or high school and college). Specifically, I found that the roles of family members, and especially mothers, seemed to be important in how the participants both viewed and told their broader stories, and so I adapted the protocol to probe for the importance of relationships.

Participants' relationships with their mothers were not the only important ways in which they were positioned. Approaching the interviews from a discourse analysis lens and specifically a focus on parts of speech and narrative voice, I found that participants positioned themselves in agreement with some individuals in their stories, and in total opposition to others. This, more than other devices in the storytelling, demonstrated what and who they allowed to shape their identities and what they did



not, or what words they allowed to nurture them and what words they did not let harm them. For instance, in a story dealing with conflict, the problem and the problem instigator was often only given 1-2 sentences of space within the telling, and the narrator's conflict resolution was given several minutes of description and accolades. With this in mind, I formulated the fourth research question to specifically explore this pattern of positioning. This question met the purpose of understanding life as narrative and the role that context, place and process play in developing and constructing identities. Upon further examination of the narrative inquiry process, I found that the approach of Clandinin & Connelly (2000) and Craig & Huber (2007) provided additional insight and clarity, as they spoke about narratives through relationship and displaying identity in relationship. This, more than discourse analysis' somewhat calculating and politically-minded focus on positioning helped me understand the ways in which participants approached family members, friends, and those with whom they interacted with in general.

In conjunction with interview protocol processes, I struggled with my own positioning and voice within the telling of the story and the guiding of the interview itself. In the initial interview, I tried to say as little as possible and even removed portions of what I had said during the transcription process, feeling that my words changed their stories too much and altered the ways in which I heard what they were trying to say through the stories. Upon further careful consideration, I realized that removal of my opinion from the texts was irresponsible to the telling of the story as my words, of course, influenced the ways in which the participant responded and was essential to understanding the dynamic relationship between storyteller/participant and

researcher. Instead of seeking to minimize ways in which my voice influenced participants, I sought a way to note my subjectivity and influence on the final project, acknowledging places where I would be biased. This is where the focus on narrative inquiry and researcher reflections as field texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) joined the research design, attempting to provide more space for the participant's voice and acknowledgement of the researcher's voice and bias wherever possible.

### **Context and Participants**

Following the results of the pilot interviews and analyses, I collected personal "core" narratives and personal artifacts with four American Muslim women in the St. Louis area, all of who had families that had immigrated from the "Middle East." Focusing on the lives of four women allowed us to meet with each at least twice over the course of the year (except in the case of Hannah), correspond regularly via email, text, and/or telephone as well as build working relationships where they were able to shape and challenge the wording of the narratives. Along with field notes and researcher reflections, the interview data and personal artifacts from "core" interviewees were used to answer the third research question. Community interviews with nine individuals and leaders, along with discourse analysis of the local newspapers articles, aided in the contextualization of these narratives, and helped to answer the first and second research questions. Finally, all texts together allowed for an examination of the fourth research question.

**Context.** While St. Louis has a relatively small Arab American and Middle Eastern-American population historically, it is growing (Massey, 2010). In fact, growth of immigrant populations in St. Louis now outpaces the rest of the nation (Dine, 2010).

As part of the Midwest, the Arab American, Middle Eastern American and Muslim populations have been under-researched in areas like St. Louis, as many have focused on New York City, and the Detroit, Michigan areas (Bayoumi, 2008; Chadhury, 2008; Maira, 2004; Sarroub, 2002). Yet, as a major refugee resettlement area, St. Louis is an interesting gateway (Singer, 2004) to study; very recently, the metropolitan area has experienced an influx of Muslim immigrants from the Sudan, Palestine, and Iraq (Dorner, Jennings, Sandoval, and Hager, under review). As the area adjusts to larger groups of immigrants arriving, there has been more local discourse about immigrants, and in particular an influx of Muslim immigrants from the Sudan, Palestine, and Iraq. Thus there are both important opportunities and necessity for research here.

***Recruitment and Participant Criteria.*** To further explore the contexts in which “core” participants found themselves, I interviewed 9 community members and leaders. I first compiled a list of organizations and individuals whom I knew had some interaction with the Middle Eastern Muslim community, such as college professors, members of interfaith dialogue organizations, and leaders on the local Council for American-Islamic Relations (CAIR). I also sought to interview some leaders who might not have much interaction with the Arab-American Muslim community but who would have some interest in understanding people from various walks of life, such as local legislators, social service providers, and public school teachers. I interviewed two local legislators, two professors (one from a private university and one from a public university), a newspaper reporter, a local minister, a retired construction worker who now runs a conversation hour for seniors, a doctor who is also well known locally as a

commentator/blogger on Islam and Egyptian politics, and the current director of CAIR-St. Louis. See Table I-1 below for further details on each.

<b>Identity Marker</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Religious Affiliation</b>
Local Legislator (Democrat)	“White”	Female	Christian
Local Legislator (Republican)	“White”	Male	Christian
Private University Professor	“White”	Male	Christian
Public University Professor	Turkish-American	Female	Muslim
Newspaper Reporter	“White”	Female	Christian
Local Minister	“White”	Female	Christian
Retiree	“White”	Male	Christian
Doctor/Blogger	Egyptian-American	Male	Muslim
Director of CAIR	Pakistani-American	Male	Muslim

**Table I-1: Community Leader Interview Participants**

In choosing the four core participants, my pilot study results and prior research indicated that because of the personal nature of participating in a narrative inquiry study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), it was important to build strong relationships with potential participants. This led to very specific sampling and selection processes. In this case, having similar gender, age, and living context provided common grounds on which to build trust. These similarities and relationships were important as well as I sought to maintain culturally sensitive interactions within the Muslim community. As I am a married woman and one-on-one interaction between men and women who are not married to each other is generally frowned upon, working solely with other women seemed the best approach. Participants were located through convenience and snowball sampling, primarily recruiting individuals from communities where I had already made

connections and those recommended by community leaders. It was through one of the professors in the community as well as with the aid of UMSL College of education professors and students that participants were found. It should be stated, then, that there is some bias in this sampling; all were highly educated, which may have lead to a particular life story and level of activism within the community, as they each sought to educate others and served in community leadership roles.

Core interview participants met the criteria listed below. 1) They identified as Muslim, practicing or non-practicing. 2) Each participant was the child of at least one immigrant parent from “the Middle East,” or had immigrated from one of these regions themselves. In this study, participant’s families had immigrated from Syria, Iraq, Egypt and Turkey. 3) They were female. 4) Participants were between the ages of 28 and 33 when we began the study, placing them between early adolescence and one year removed from traditional college age during the time of the 9/11 attacks. 5) All of the women lived in the area for several years prior to beginning the study. 6) All of the participants had lived in the U.S. at the time of 9/11. Finally, 7) all core participants had native or native-like proficiency in English so that the narratives articulated their thoughts and identities to the best of their abilities and in their own words.

Participants signed consent forms, per IRB procedures. Participants were told about their rights to confidentiality of their identity, location, and the obscuring of other items that they wished not to disclose in print. In addition, as narrators themselves, they co-constructed the stories and had final say over what was included in their chapter, what needed to be added after the interview, and what they wanted removed from the written narrative, if anything.

## **Data Collection**

I collected four types of data, each of these requiring a different process: 1) local newspaper articles representing Arab-American Muslims between 1999 and 2011, 2) interview data from community leaders and four core life interview participants, 3) personal artifacts, and (4) personal field notes and reflections. The collection of newspaper data occurred prior to interviews, as a way of creating a baseline of information. Interviews and personal artifact collection occurred simultaneously, as core participants were asked to bring personal artifacts to our initial interview. Following a multi-dimensional narrative approach (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) meant that I attempted to incorporate more than one perspective in the telling of a story, remembering that every story has more than one perspective or dimension. In this particular approach, interview data accounted for the participants' discourse, while the artifact brought in a visual expression of their identity/lives. The newspaper articles and community interviews, then, told more about the discourse in the wider community, while my reflective journal and field notes represented my own interpretations of participants' stories and identities. The following paragraphs describe each of these data sources in greater detail.

**Newspaper Article Collection.** I utilized the LexisNexis Academia database to collect texts from the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* newspaper, using "Arab" and "Muslim" as keywords in the search. Within the time frame from 1999 to 2011, 632 articles relate to these keywords: 457 are Associated Press (AP) or News Services produced (not connected to writers from the local paper, but printed therein), 95 are news articles written by someone connected to the local paper, 48 are opinion articles, 18 are found

in the letters to the editor section, and 14 have been identified as “other” (religion, business or film critic reports). See Figure I-1 and Figure I-2 for further detail.

From within these search parameters and within each year, I chose to focus upon the letters to the editor and opinion articles, as those best represent the local (and vocal) discourse (following procedures in Dorner, 2011). As a number of the printed opinion editorial articles were also from the Associated Press, the final analysis focused upon 30 opinion pieces and letters to the editor that were written by St. Louis area residents. While AP articles give a sense of the national overtones and the locally written news articles give a sense of the journalistic tone in local press, opinion articles and letters to the editor are usually written by the most vocal persons in the area and as persons who do not write to earn a living, write only what they are passionate about. Therefore, articles within these two veins reflect the sentiments of local citizens who feel strongly about this topic and capture some aspect of the general public opinion. In so doing, I hoped to give a clear picture of discourse about and surrounding Arab and Middle Eastern American Muslims. Coupled with a series of interviews with local community members, I argue that these data provide an important part of the picture, of how vocal participants in public debate represented and discussed Arab Americans and/or Muslims in St. Louis during the last decade.

**Community Interviews.** In an effort to better contextualize the narratives of core participants as well as the newspaper data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine community leaders. These interviews asked participants about the general treatment of immigrants in their neighborhoods, as well as their interactions in the Arab-American Muslim community and how this particular group has been talked

about and welcomed. For further detail, see Appendix II, Protocol A. Interviews lasted anywhere from four minutes (with one particularly nervous and non-verbose participant) to ninety minutes with one of the local politicians; on average, interviews lasted approximately one hour (See Table I-1 for more detail).

**Core Interviews and Artifact Collection.** As core participants were contacted, I informed them that I would like to conduct two to three interviews over the span of a year. Prior to meeting for the initial interview, I spoke with potential participants to explain my research interests, the consent forms, and made my request for a personal artifact that would help them tell their life stories. I explained that the initial interview would be the longest and served as a forum for the participant to tell their story, focusing on the elements that they wished to tell. We would use subsequent interviews to review transcripts from the previous interview, wordles generated from these transcripts, fill in places I felt there were ‘gaps’ in the story and to talk with them about themes or genres I thought may have emerged from their narratives. In order to reduce researcher interruption and increase their familiarity and comfort levels with the material discussed, participants were provided with guiding questions and written information on the purpose of the study at least 24 hours prior to the first interview, and transcripts and notes were emailed to participants for review prior to follow up interviews. The protocol for interviewing core participants in the initial interview followed a modified life history approach. See Appendix II for a protocol B, adapted from Rosenthal (1993) and McAdams (2006). First interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes each; subsequent interviews lasted anywhere from 25 minutes to three hours



as we spoke about follow up questions and addressed ideas and issues of great meaning to participants.

I asked participants to choose the location of our interviews, and all chose coffee shops in their neighborhoods to meet. Also, while words may help in shaping identity, they still only relate part of the story, and so I asked participants to bring images or tactile objects, as it allowed clearer contextualization and a place to begin their stories. For some, the personal artifact was a photograph or several of them. Other artifacts presented included newspaper clippings, plates from a Bazaar, a laptop bag and a Farside comic book, all items participants felt significant in the telling of their lives. The objects were photographed towards the beginning of the interview, as participants were asked about how these helped to tell their stories. As being photographed with the object made confidentiality more difficult, we chose to only have the artifact photographed, though in each case discussed the possibility of having each person photographed with her artifact. In the cases where photographs revealed the identity of persons closest to them, I chose to include only a description of the photograph and not the photograph itself to maintain confidentiality of both the participant and their families.

Using the protocol as a guide, the interview continued with open-ended questions that encouraged the participant to tell their story, focusing on elements that they wished to tell. Probing questions were used only for clarification or elaboration at this point. Then, a series of follow-up/final questions were utilized for two reasons: (1) to review the life story linearly and draw upon the importance of context, social settings, individual experiences and time (Bronfenbrenner, 1995); and (2) to draw out

what the participant views as important meanings or meaning-making events, values developed, or lessons learned. That is, I encouraged them to group events around episodic memories, rather than chronological time.

Relationships with participants were maintained throughout this study, as I sought to deepen an understanding of those I interviewed, our meaning making together in relationship, and their narrative experiences. Follow-up interviews focused on eliciting information related to adolescence, key events and identity formation as well as clarification or elaboration in connection to my initial findings and understandings of the first transcript. In this way, we began a process where they could read what I had already written, reflect upon ways this aligned or dis-aligned with their intended narrative, and add, correct or subtract portions of the story to fit with what they felt best reflected their life story. This method was modified for two of the participants, as they had also participated in the pilot study and agreed to further our discussions, working relationships, and dialogue. With these participants, the prior interviews served as background information and opportunity to better establish co-writing practices. For example, one of the pilot studies was utilized for coursework on life history and emerging adulthood. The participant responded and supplemented my writing both prior to submission of the paper for the course and upon the adaptation of this work into these research questions. In fact, consecutive interviews with these two participants primarily focused on this study's specific research questions as it had been modified from earlier practices. (See Table I-2 for more information on the co-writing process).

**Field Note Collection and Reflective Journal.** During the course of each interview, I attempted to jot down notes about things that could not be captured within

a digital audio recording: moments where participants smile, shake their heads, frown, or stare at something for example. Recording these moments allowed me to create a transcript that more fully represents the interaction, despite the limits of text. In addition to these notes recorded during the interview, I wrote reflective journal entries after returning home, thinking about the process, and trying to connect what I had just heard with concepts I had read about or heard from other participants. In doing this, I hoped to separate my understandings and formations of the narratives from those of the interviewees, giving distinct space for each and acknowledging that my understandings and weaving of the texts are not the same as the participant speaking in her own ways. It was within these places and spaces that I began to develop an understanding of the narrative threads or themes that ran through all four lives.

### **Data Analysis**

Data was analyzed in several steps, focusing attention primarily on one source at a time. As newspaper data was readily available, I began looking at the big picture within the news print and then focused upon specific local media discourse therein, utilizing discourse analysis which focused on parts of speech and narrator voice. Following this, I conducted and performed initial analysis on community interview data as I began core interviews. I concluded the processes by analyzing core participant interviews through comparison during transcription, subsequent interviews and discussions, co-writing opportunities, and occasionally returning to community interviews for further insight. Each of these data analysis processes is described below, in this order, and in depth.

**Analytic Procedures.** Newspaper articles and community leader interviews, though both constructed and addressed as texts here, worked as different types of texts and as such, were analyzed differently. Discourse analysis, specifically focused on pronoun and verb usage as well as selected narrator voice, was used to address the visual texts of the newspaper opinion pieces. Interview texts were a more complicated data source that required a degree of interpretation in their transfer from auditory to visual texts, and thereby required not only transcription but decisions on how those transcripts were represented and coded. In addition, the core interviews contained both oral texts and the telling of identities, and participant narratives held different qualities than the newspaper pieces and community interviews. This required a different approach to initial analysis: a recognition of how episodic memory works, how themes present themselves, and how the narrator presents their own “truth.” This understanding and the separate kinds of analysis necessarily are explored in detail below.

**Newspaper analysis.** Utilizing a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and open coding procedures, I began to think about the data in terms of time lines and ideas, creating tables around chronological events and then patterns emerged. For instance, following the events on September 11, 2001, a particular phrase began to appear in writing and speech, from the *L.A. Times* to the *New York Times*. “If we [take this action], then the terrorists have won,” was repeated over and over. Though no mention of this trend was made, the phrase first appeared in a letter to the editor printed by *The St. Louis Post Dispatch* on October 21, 2001 (“If we yield to fear, the terrorists win”). In the weeks that followed, this phrase was not utilized often in letters to the

editor or in the editorials, but both places often served as discussion boards for what this meant, who terrorists might be, where they were, and how best to combat their actions. In other words, “what makes the terrorists win?” seemed to serve as a central theme and question for over six months.

Besides using a grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) approach and open coding procedures to find general themes, I was then inspired by critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1993; Gee, 2005). One aspect that immediately stood out was the placement of pieces and turn taking between opinions. Specifically, when both positive and negative opinions of “Arabs” and “Muslims” were present, pieces that expressed negative or unfavorable opinions of Muslims were often placed first in the section. Also, in times of heightened vitriol (2001 and 2006 specifically) bylines for the pieces that held more positive and favorable opinions of Muslims were withheld.

Focusing on a more micro-level, I also identified grammatical structures that helped construct and support these themes and ideas. Specifically, I identified forms, and focused on parts of speech and voicing as a construction of authority within each piece. I paid particular attention to pronouns, looking for when “us” was used versus “we,” and what each pronoun signified. For example, in the case of Sabourin’s (2001) letter to the editor, it was the use of “we” that first drew my attention and then, upon further inspection, who was signified each time by this pronoun. He stated, “We must be united as Americans regardless of our ethnic backgrounds or religious beliefs”. (para. 4). Here, in his list of “regardless” elements, he specifically focused on ethnic backgrounds and religious beliefs, indicating to the reader that he considered all

Americans part of this endeavor. However, he does seem to have perceived these elements as something that, in the eyes of many Americans, may set them apart.

I also paid attention to the ordering and placement of adjectives. While it was common to see “Arab-American” or “Muslim American” used as a descriptor, McElyea (2001, September 26) used the phrase “Americans who are Muslim and of Arabic descent” (para. 2). In describing them first as Americans and then by their religious and ethnic groups, he set an unusual precedent. Though the prepositional phrases required for these formations is slightly cumbersome, the effect was one of greater unity than displayed anywhere else in any of the other letters I encountered. I also looked for places where writers chose “terrorist” over “jihadist,” or “Arab-American Muslims” over an all-encompassing “Americans,” trying to distinguish where and why writers felt one was more appropriate than the other. While the findings below explore some of the discourse grammatical analysis—the emotive language and vivid images conjured by letters to the editor and editorials, as well as the use of “we,” “us,” “them,” and occasionally “they” in the texts—these are used to inform and support themes that grew out of open coding practices, as I report them in chapter two. Table II-1 illustrates these categorizations and themes.

***Community Member and Leader interviews.*** Conducted between newspaper analysis and core interviews, community member and leader interviews were analyzed individually as part of documenting the broader community narrative about attitudes towards immigrants and Muslims. Interviews with community participants were transcribed with the help of two college students who had both transcript experience and close connections to the Muslim community through student organizations. These

transcripts utilized a more targeted method in both the transcription and analysis. The transcription assistants transcribed word for word answers to all of the protocol questions, skipping areas that were not related to this topic of study. Upon receiving these transcripts, I again used open coding methods as I looked for themes and patterns that ran between the interviews, and areas where the interviewees' comments contrasted with other interviewees. Upon the determination of themes, systematic coding continued and themes were checked with members of the St. Louis Educational Research Group (SLERG).

***Core Interview Analysis.*** Analysis primarily followed a narrative inquiry approach (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), though was supported through discourse analysis. Specifically, during the transcription process and initial analysis phase, audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and explored in-depth using transcription notations adapted from Jefferson (1999). Examples of the notions used can be seen in Appendix III. Following this, each interview was segmented into kernel stories/episodic memories. Beginning and ending points of each of were determined by natural breaks in the story, e.g., where the participant stopped to take a drink of water, or the use of rhetorical devices such as “you know?” and “so...” These narratives within the narrative were compared with other story segments for genres and emerging themes. Themes primarily related to roles of individuals in relation to the participant or lessons learned during their reflection upon the event, as Bruner (2004) and McAdams (2006) suggest these play a role in how we make sense of our own stories and identities. The narrative themes found among all four women were:

1. Misunderstandings: These were abundant, hurtful and often something that would challenge participants and drive them to speak out.
2. Assimilation: often their stories illustrated ways in which they navigated in-betweenness and bicultural identities
3. Emerging Adulthood: For each of the participants, late adolescence to early adulthood was a time of change and self exploration.
4. Generativity: Similar to McAdam's (2006) findings on generative adults, participants told stories of how they had blessed childhoods, and yet also noticed and acknowledged struggles of those around them, leading to their own participation in community leadership roles.
5. Familial Ties: In identity development, assimilation practices and in community leadership, parents and other family members served as models for participants and played integral roles in the telling of their stories.

After development of these themes, I returned to the writing and representation of interviews and transcripts within the study, leaving them more intact and approached each with a broader lens. This time, I reconstructed the narrative in depth by connecting the artifacts, interviews and interactions of the participants. The first task was to weave together my field notes with direct transcription of the digitally recorded interviews (using Jefferson's 1999 notations). After completion of the transcription notations, I listened and reflected upon the recorded interviews, taking notes on the stories and looking for deeper understandings beyond the technical transcription aspect. I drew upon thick descriptions I created during the interview and wove these together with the interview transcript, notes on the interview created through re-listening to the



interactions and the artifacts to present what I felt best illustrated our lived experiences together (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

The purpose of this was two fold. First, in thinking about representation of participants, I wanted to convey their own words, actions, and visual texts as much as possible. As a white researcher focused on telling the stories who those who had different experiences and lives, I felt it was most important to let their words and thoughts speak for themselves where space allowed. Secondly, in thinking about this study from both a narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1995) standpoint, it was important to share as much of the context of individual experiences as possible. Contexts, I argue, are a key element to each identity development story, and to understand how identity has been shaped we must be aware of the location and the time in which these events occurred.

In addition, participants were sent multiple drafts as the research progressed, and were encouraged to co-create and co-write the story, as they added details, further explained events and their reflections, or removed particular details from the written narrative. In doing so, together we created a multi-dimensional life experience narrative which deals with identity, emerging adulthood and the confining representations often encountered by minorities in the United States and, more specifically, in the Midwest.

Following the first interview with Hannah, I tried several times to meet with her again but schedules did not allow it. She also was not interested in following up further via phone or email. In working with Amira and Rose, I heard “looks great!” several times via email and received an additional article or something they had written to help

better illustrate an idea, but most of the co-writing was done within the second interview itself as I presented wordles, previous transcripts and talked about where I saw their stories overlap with other participants. In each case, participants were quick to critique their own choice of words from previous interviews and to rephrase or further elaborate on similarities between their own narratives and themes I presented. Of the four “core” participants, Ashley was the one most engaged in the co-writing process. She was quick to respond to emails, quick to challenge my understanding of Turkish culture and history, and very interested in reading and helping revise several drafts of her narrative chapter. See Table I-2 for a summary of interactions and co-writing experiences with each participant.

Participant	Interview Dates	Co-Writing Sessions	Type of Sessions
<b>Ashley</b>	11/12/10, 10/27/11	7	Interviews, 6 emails, 2 additional files (articles)
<b>Hannah</b>	9/17/11	0	
<b>Rose</b>	10/25/11, 2/14/12	3	Interviews, 2 emails, short texts
<b>Amira</b>	5/21/09, 1/28/12	5	Interviews, 4 emails, 2 additional files (memoir and newspaper clipping)

**Table I-2: Core Participant Interaction**

### **Potential Limitations: Trustworthiness, Transferability and Researcher**

#### **Positioning**

This study seeks to tell the stories of four individuals in an under-researched area, and not to generalize the experiences of all Arab-American Muslims. While the specific findings may not directly link to a larger population, the methods used here to

explore identity have important implications for our classrooms and for educators, as explained in greater detail below.

As someone who has taught English as a Second Language and English Composition in a multitude of settings, high school through adult education programs for the last nine years, I came to this process as someone passionate about stories, about lives, and about the telling of identities. However, the identities being told are different from my own, and there is the inherent danger that in the retelling, I may misinterpret words or ideas. With this concern in mind, I used several safeguards for purposes of trustworthiness. Over the course of the last three years as I have worked on other research projects. I joined a small yet diverse group consisting of two professors and five (sometimes more, sometimes less) graduate students to meet, discuss, collaborate and hold each other accountable. As I began transcription, coded and developed findings, I turned to this group and its members for feedback and guidance.

In addition, as is common in Narrative Inquiry practices (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), participants became co-researchers. They were contacted and consulted several times during the analysis phases for feedback, rewriting and clarification purposes. The reflective journal I kept in blog format allowed me to record my thoughts and feelings separately from the transcript and field notes. This also was visible to both community and core participants, who occasionally provided me with comments and questions. This was helpful for reminding me that my words and thoughts were and are indeed, part of this multi-dimensional narrative, but they belong in my perspective, not representing the thoughts and words of the original narrator themselves. In using newspaper articles, interviews, field notes, reflections, personal artifacts and member

check procedures, I attempted to provide triangulation of data for additional support within the findings, as well as provide a multi-dimensional narrative out of several perspectives. Finally, the past three years I served as a research assistant to professors in the field have helped me hone my skills as a researcher. This skill building, along with the pilot study process positioned me to better understand this context and helped me change prior assumptions about what I might find.

### **Significance**

What occurs when, in the midst of teenage and early adult years, you find yourself and the group with which you associate under intense scrutiny and alienation in the society where you live? While a number of studies have explored this question in the years immediately following the September 11, 2001 attacks (Nacos & Torres-Reyes, 2007; Sarroub, 2002; Sirin & Fine, 2008) few studies have attempted analysis of this group as they come into adulthood. Fewer still have used discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1993; Gee, 2005) and Narrative Inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) to examine ways in which they construct their identities (Arnett, 2000; Erickson, 1959; Hall, 1996), aligning or dis-aligning with the discourse in the society. As Brofenbrenner's (1995) theory shows, the confluence of person, place, time and context helps to shape each individual, and as each person is different, so are their stories and what they bring into an educational setting. In this vein, this study examines the larger local discourse, along with participants' personal narratives using narrative inquiry and discourse analysis.

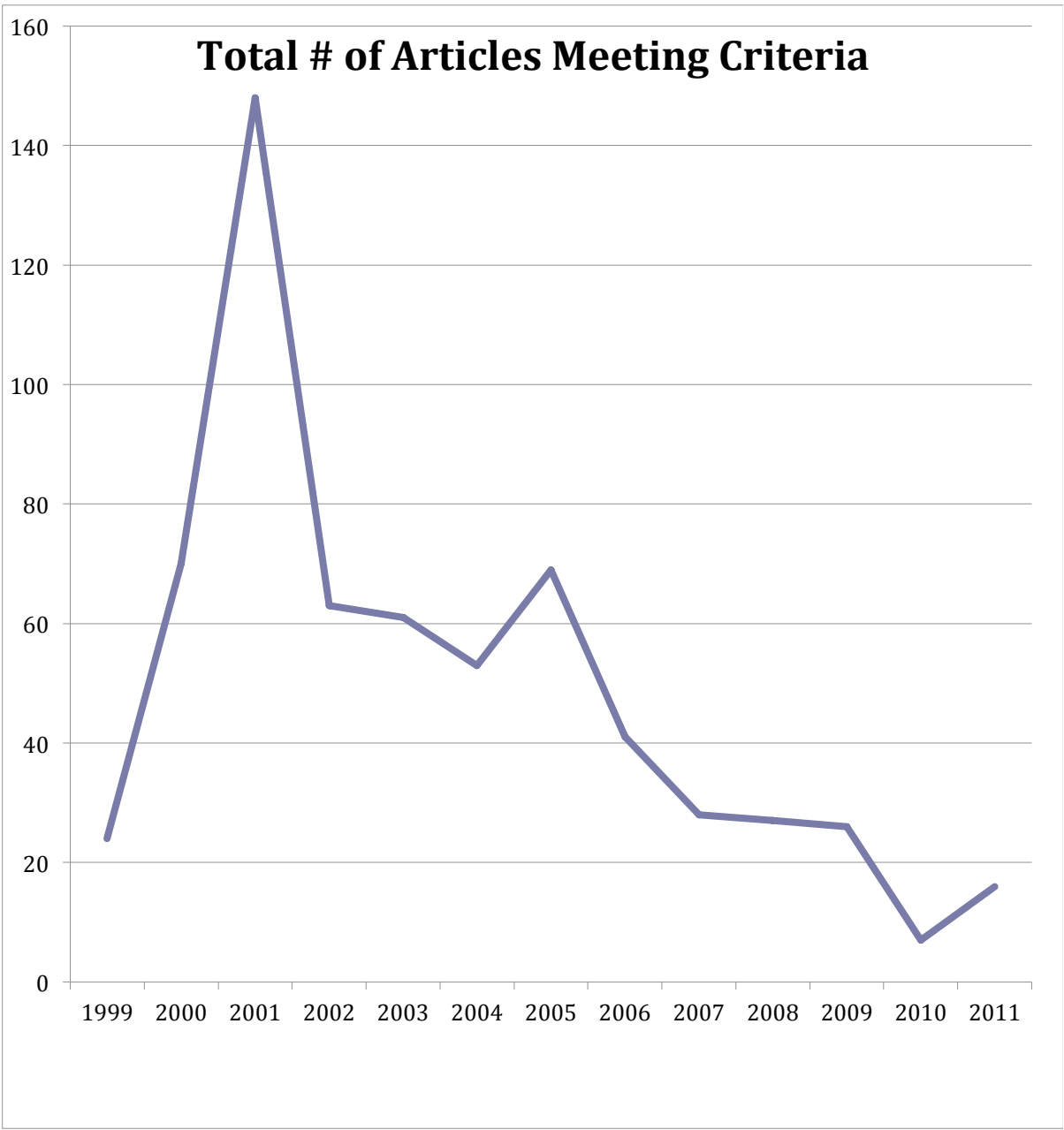
As Langellier (1989) indicates is possible within narrative study, I hope that this research will raise consciousness to participants' ethnic and religious identity

development triumphs and struggles. Most importantly, in the retelling of these stories and identities, as an educator and researcher, I sought to increase sensitivity of fellow educators and administrators, as well as students, to the variety of experiences in our classrooms. I anticipate future discussion of this research will allow parents, educators, administrators and researchers space to talk about cross cultural challenges, as well as the richness of knowledge and experience that these interactions also afford.

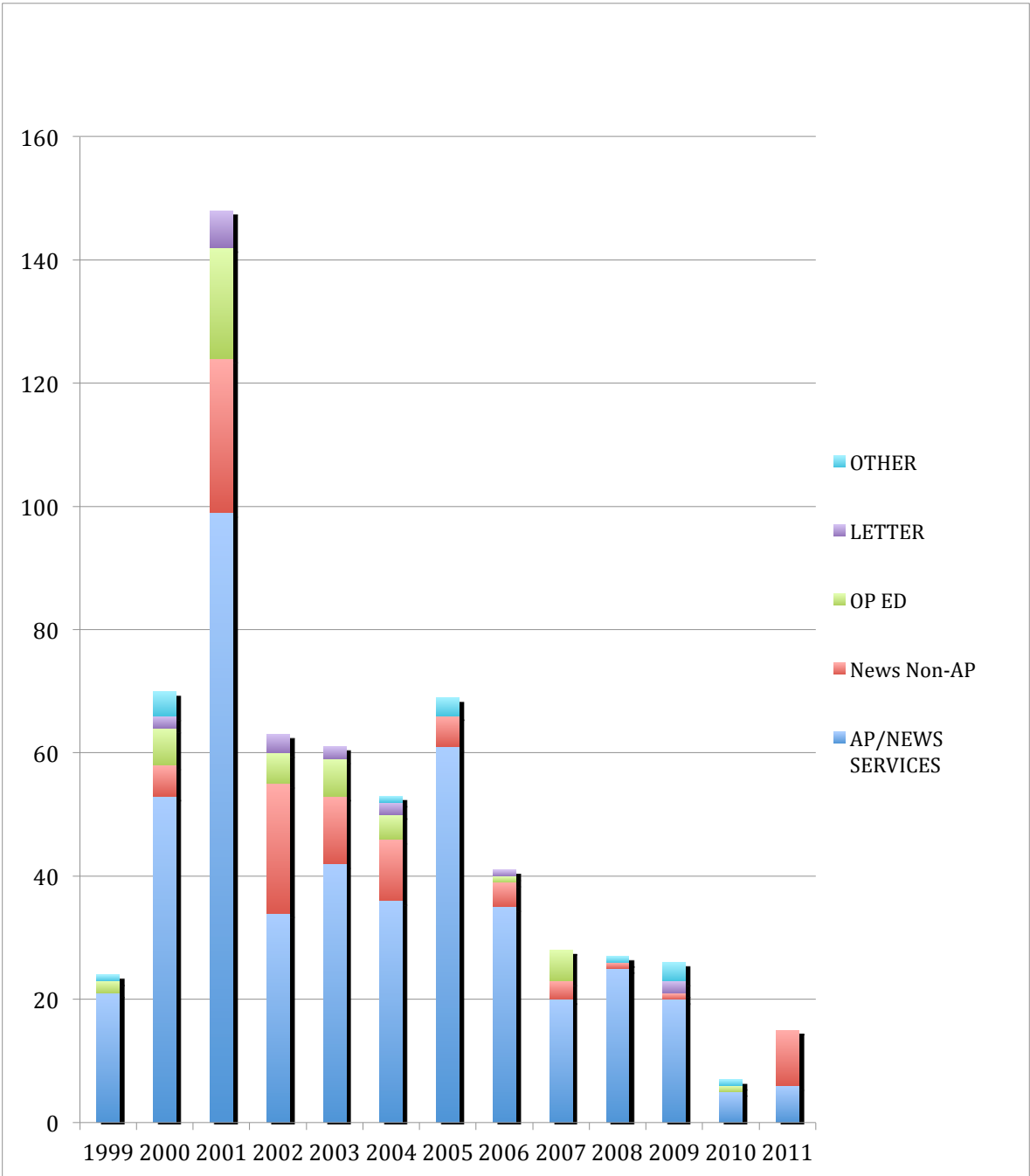
As we now accept that identity development is an on-going process throughout life but one that intensifies in adolescence and emerging adulthood, findings should indicate not only the importance of context in identity development, but also public discourse surrounding ethnic and religious affiliations. As an educator and researcher who was changed greatly by the last decade and the ways in which I've seen discourse and several historical contexts impact my students, this is perhaps the most significant contribution I hope to make through this study.

In the following chapters, I will address the four research questions in turn. In chapter two, I contextualize the local discourse through newspaper and community leader interview data and analysis, which allows narratives (and identities) to be better understood within the appropriate contexts. Following this, in chapters three, four, five and six, I introduce and present the life history narratives of Ashley, Hannah, Rose and Amira, situating each within theory on emerging adulthood, generativity, bicultural and in-between identities, and familial ties. In chapter seven, I discuss the ways in which all four of these narratives intersect and provide insight into the themes that emerged and my understanding of them. Finally, in chapter eight, I discuss recommendations

for further study, implications of this work, its methods and ways in which educational institutions might best utilize the information found here.



**Figure I-1: Total number of articles containing the keywords "Arab" and "Muslim" in The St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 1999-2011.**



**Figure I-2: Total number of articles containing keywords "Arab" and/or "Muslim" in The St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 1999-2011. Separated by article type and year.**



## **II Discourses About Muslims in St. Louis: Opinions from *The St. Louis Post Dispatch* 1999-2011**

Historically speaking, the United States is slow to accept those who identify as non-white and who embrace hyphenated or “in between” (Sarroub, 2002) identities. To explore what this means for my core participants, how ethnic and religious groups are being framed within discussions and greater societal discourse must be explored. In the following pages, I contextualize the life history narratives through local discourse surrounding September 11, 2001 and beyond by analyzing 1) thirteen years worth of opinion editorials and letters to the editor from *The St. Louis Post Dispatch* and 2) nine qualitative community leader interviews. Specifically, my research in this chapter situates narrative identity development in time and space by examining community discourse through these research questions: 1) How was the Arab-American Muslim population represented in local St. Louis media between 1999 and 2011? 2) How do community leaders, Muslim and non-Muslim, represent the Arab-American Muslim population in St. Louis?

### **Outside Looking In: Media Coverage Post 9/11 and its Impact**

Directly following the events on 9/11, many leaders, including President George W. Bush, urged Americans repeatedly not to blame Arabs and Muslims in the United States as a whole for the terrorist deeds of a few. As time went by, however, these suggestions were quieted or ignored. This seemed to open opportunities for angrier voices, which tended towards more emotive language, and language that focused on fear and possible discrimination. By the time of the first September 11 anniversary, the news reflected this shift toward more critical and negative positions

surrounding members of the Muslim and Arab communities. Given these changes, it was not surprising that Nacos & Torres-Reyna (2007) found significantly more news stories in the *New York Times*, *New York Daily News*, *New York Post* and *USA Today* as negative or critical of American Muslims and Arabs than were positive or supportive six months following 9/11 (Nacos & Torres-Reyna, 2007, p. 50). Haddad (2011) has claimed that the media purposefully sought out Muslims who felt disenfranchised and disillusioned with their religious traditions, and were quick to lend credibility to Islamophobic sentiments already in circulation, particularly those about Muslims living in America and their plans to do evil. They were touted as “national informants,” and helped stoke the fears and stereotypes present in rumors about the faith.

The findings of the Pew Research Center’s study of Muslim Americans (2007) attested to the shifting attitudes and growing difficulties. Many who were interviewed for this Pew study stated that they had experienced less-than-welcoming attitudes in recent years and a majority (53%) found life post-9/11 more difficult. This was not a surprise as a 2002 CNN/Gallup/USA Today poll found while 80% of Americans believed racial profiling was wrong before 9/11, 60% later favored racial profiling “as long as it [was] directed towards Arabs and Muslims” (Maira, 2004).

While numerous studies have now examined Muslim youths’ experiences on the East coast (Sirin & Fine, 2008; Bayoumi, 2008; Sarroub, 2002) and others have examined the nation as a whole (the Pew Research Studies, 2007; Nacos & Torres-Reyna, 2007), few have looked specifically at the Midwest and more specifically, the St. Louis area where I currently reside and work. This chapter seeks to contextualize the life history narratives within this particular physical space as well as within the

historical context. While 9/11 is now more than a decade behind us, the discourse surrounding those events, and others continue to shape local public discourse and the images surrounding what is perceived to be “Arab” and “Muslim.”

### **The Contextual Nature of Identity Processes (A Reminder from Chapter One)**

As was stated in chapter one, identity development is on going and does not occur in isolation from other persons, places and events. This process is different for each person, in each stage of life, and is shaped by the historic events that occur and the varied settings and spaces in which people find themselves (Bronfenbrenner, 1995).

While each of my core participants began their stories in different spaces and experienced 9/11 in different places across the U.S., each now analyzes her life story while living in St. Louis. Therefore, the context of this city and the local discourse became important in understanding how they told their stories and understood their experiences. My desire to situate the stories within the bigger picture of the St. Louis metropolitan area and to understand them as part of this bigger picture is what shaped both the research questions and the analysis that follows.

**St. Louis.** The 2010 Census data indicated that while the immigrant population in the St. Louis metropolitan area was small, representing only about 4% of the total population, 30% of the population growth in metropolitan area since 2000 was attributed to the arrival and settlement of a diverse group of immigrants and refugees (Dorner et al, in review). What this meant for St. Louis and its future was unclear. While one article in *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch* declared, “Missouri now a ‘destination state’ for immigrants” (Dine, 2010, September 6) and another “From dearth of immigrants, growth here outpaces nation” (Dine, 2010, September 5), others have

argued that St. Louis' days as an immigrant destination have largely passed (Singer, 2004). Despite this, legislators in Missouri filed more than a dozen anti-immigration bills in 2011, and anti-immigrant profiling was reported in the St. Louis and areas across the state (MIRA, 2011). So, within this particular context of a small but growing immigrant population and growing anti-immigrant sentiment, what is the local discourse surrounding Muslims and those of Arab descent? How might this shape the narratives of core participants in the following chapters?

### **Findings**

There were some distinctly contrastive findings between the newspaper and interview discourse, but the overall finding is that the context of St. Louis for Muslims is full of fear, misunderstanding and misrepresentations of identity. Findings in newspaper data from 1999 to 2011 indicated a long-term focus upon Israel and Palestine, with opinions that spanned the spectrum: in opinion pieces, some would chastise those who would lash out against Muslims, while many believed all Muslims, foreign or American born, were a threat. While the community interviews (only from 2011) also provided a range of attitudes, respondents were less extreme in their language usage; while some expressed sadness over the treatment of Muslims post-9/11, they explained it as part of "human nature" to be distrustful and tend towards violence, and those who voiced distrust of Muslims did so very carefully. The analysis that follows examines the chronological development of rhetoric on Muslims over time, found in the newspaper opinion pieces. Within this analysis then, I draw from the interview data to expand upon the major themes.

These main themes, all of which highlight the difficult context for Muslims in St. Louis, appeared across the opinion editorial discourse and the community interviews repeatedly: Misunderstandings, Insider/Outsider Positioning, and Ascribing Identities (often incorrectly). Misunderstandings and misinformation about who Arab-Americans and Muslims framed a large portion of the local discourse and, as Ashley claimed, “still seems to control the discussion today” (personal correspondence). The second “big picture” concept was positioning; who was defined as “we” and who was defined as “they” in each piece varied slightly, but was very telling about levels of fear and acceptance. The final issue has to do with the various ways St. Louisans ascribed the wrong identity to fellow residents. There were also changing perceptions on what it meant to be Arab and Muslim over time, which added to the fearful context created.

**Fear and cyclical rhetoric in the newspaper.** How was the Arab-American Muslim population represented in The St. Louis Post-Dispatch between 1999 and 2011? While this seemed to change and evolve as historical events took place and the focus on Arab-American Muslims waxed and waned, it seemed that local writers reiterated that Muslims were not threats, not terrorists, and had lived quiet lives as Americans for many years. However, they were not particularly welcomed in neighborhoods, either. Although there was a growing curiosity about Islam expressed in the editorial pages over time, writers were often reacting to greater negative discourse. For the most part, that discourse was not expressed on these pages, but was part of the national and growing sense of distrust and unease about terrorism and the roles Arab-American Muslims might play.

Time Period	Theme	Numbers of articles fitting the theme
1999-Sept. 2001	Israel, Palestine and Rights	5
Jan. 7, 2009-2011		3
Sept. 14, 2001-Oct. 2001	Quelling anger, appealing to reason	6
October 2001	“If we [take this action], the terrorists have won.”	7
May 2004- 2005	“Reprehensible Behaviors”	5
Nov. 2006-2010	Growing Violence, misrepresentation	4

**Table II-1: Chronological Themes Found in Opinion Editorial Discourse**

Looking at data from a chronological perspective, the findings are organized around the following themes: 1) First, prior to 9/11, there was much concern over the Palestinian and Israeli land rights and war situation. 2) Following 9/11, there was a focus on quelling anger, and appealing to reason. 3) Then, it became popular to say that “if we [take this action], the terrorists have won.” 4) As the war on terror continued, in Afghanistan, Iraq and Abu Ghraib, there were “reprehensible behaviors,” but no one was sure who to blame. 5) Finally, while 9/11 saw the greatest surge in hate crimes against American Muslims, five years later and beyond, there was again growing violence against Muslims. (Note that the first theme appeared both 1999-2001 and again 2009-2011, indicating the cyclical nature of this particular discussion in the community and the primary discussion surrounding “Arabs” and “Muslims” in the community focusing on Palestinians.)

A common thread in all five chronological themes is the sense of fear and distrust of the “Arab” and/or “Muslim” community, as detailed by the three main findings presented in this chapter on the context: Misunderstandings, Insider/Outsider Positioning and Ascribed Identities. Though there were several who spoke in support

of Arab-Americans and Muslims, especially following September 11, 2001, they did so in reaction to negative discourse, rather than positive events or pieces in the newspaper. Then, over the years, there was escalation in the discourse towards fear and violence.

In other words, the opinion pieces mirrored the community interviews in their presentation of Muslims, all indicating a context full of misunderstandings and misrepresentations. Moreover, the selection and number of articles printed indicated *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch* editors attempted to appear unbiased, allowing space to multiple positions and attitudes, and even leaving by-lines off of opinion pieces in crucial moments (directly following 9/11 and around the five-year anniversary) that could have incited negative reactions against particular journalists. However, in the physical positioning of the editorials, and the places where emotive language was very strong, especially in placing a number of the incendiary pieces first in a section, the paper skewed towards more fearful and negative discourse and attitudes surrounding Arab-Americans and Muslims.

***Palestinian and Israeli land rights—Misunderstandings & ascribed identities.***

With approximately 60,000 members, the Jewish population in the St. Louis area is the largest in the interior United States (Ehrlich, 1997). Beyond numbers alone, this group is active, influential and vocal, often garnering national and international attention. In fact, a St. Louis businessman and journalist headed up an influential organization in the Zionist movement (Ehrlich, 1997). Knowing this, it was unsurprising that in the earliest years of this investigation (1999-2000), most usage of “Arab” and “Muslim” in the discourse surrounded the Israeli-Palestinian conflict rather than any local or national discussion about identity or belonging.

As the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was something of import and personal association for local writers identifying as part of the local Jewish community, discourse often favored Israel's position. One striking element here in terms of power structures and genre within the discourse was that despite the fact that St. Louis already had a Palestinian-American population, none of these voices were given space in the opinion section. In fact, no local individuals who outright identified as Muslim were presented until October 23, 2001. On October 31, 2000, the first letter to the editor pertinent to this research and topic was printed, begging *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch* editors to be more "balanced" in their coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (Kirschbaum, 2000). The only related letter printed that day was focused on the rights of Israel to exist and the wrongful tactics of the Palestinians in fighting for the land.

November 15, however, an additional four letters were printed on this topic. The first (Iftikhar, 2000) was written by the director of the St. Louis Chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), and sought to humanize Palestinians and Muslims, especially youth involved in the conflict. The second (Silberstein, 2000), was again pro-Israeli and upset with the way a previous piece had portrayed the older Israeli soldiers. "This gives the impression that the writer is subtly blaming the Israelis as it implies that they should know better than to kill children," Silberstein concluded. While it must strike one as odd that two readers found the same article to be biased in opposite ways, it makes clear just how contentious this issue of Israeli/Palestinian rights and actions was for these vocal citizens of St. Louis.

The discussion of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and rights was addressed in two community interviews as well. As I was speaking with a local politician running for



office as a Republican, I brought up the surge of negative articles seen in 2001 and 2005 surrounding the term “Arab,” and he stated, “Before, they were just thinking Arabs, Arabs are attacking Israel, and Arabs are doing that.” It is telling that he frames “Arabs,” an entire ethnic group, as aggressors against a nation, rather than acknowledging Palestinians and their position in the struggle with Israel. The doctor-blogger who identifies as Muslim himself stated, “I have been trying to analyze what happened soon after September 11th and the things entailed since then. *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch* received big, big, big, pro-Israel writings, [and it’s] Zionism that is underlying a lot of this.” And so, for him, the Israel/Palestinian conflict seems central to the negative discourse that was and has grown following 9/11.

Thus, within discourse about Palestine and Israel, we see how misunderstanding ascribed identities define the St. Louis context for Muslims. One of the most interesting illustrations of the misunderstanding surrounding Israeli and Palestinian issues occurred after I had turned off my tape recorder, but I took field notes on the interaction immediately following. During and after my interview with the retired construction worker in the coffee shop, he seemed extremely nervous. I found out why as soon as I turned off the recorder—he thought I might be reporting him to the police or religious organizations.

After I assured him that I was just doing educational research for my dissertation, he launched into a self-defense, stating, “I mean, when it comes down to it, everyone will choose someone of their own race, their own religion, over others. That’s just the way of human nature.” He then said “I’d choose Jewish people over Muslims, because at least Jews believe the same God.” I spoke up “Muslims believe in the same

God." He actually seemed genuinely surprised by this, and I began to wonder what other misinformation he had heard about Muslims (FN 9/21/2011).

Some outside of the Muslim and Arab community talked about how they were perceived as part of the Arab/Muslim group. That is, local residents mis-ascribed identities, as a local reporter told me:

My husband, I forgot about this, he used to work for [a nearby community] as a Civil Engineer. And he was at, and it is very white, and a lot of the people have been there for a long time. There's sort of two waves of people: the people that have been there for a long time and the people with new families that are coming in, but it's still very very white. And to me, sometimes a little bit desperate I would say. My Mom lives there now and we love, I mean, the people are very nice....So, [my husband] is at an event and this Alderman is sort of eyeballing him. And he's very old. He is probably like in his 70's or 80's and he walks up to [him] and he reaches out and shakes his hand, and he pulls him in close, and he says, "are you an Arab?" Doesn't say, "Where are you from, son?" Doesn't say anything like that goes straight to the point. And he pulls back and just kind of looks at him like, you've got to be kidding me. He says, "No, I am from South America."

The misunderstandings and misrepresentation extends beyond fear towards particular physical attributes, into assumed connection between Arab-American heritage and Islamic beliefs, as well as associating the actions and beliefs of Hezbollah and Hamas terrorists with all Muslims.

When I began asking questions about “Muslims” and “Arabs” in St. Louis, those who were Muslim often tried to talk to me about the diversity here. For instance, Bosnian Muslims represented a large portion of the Muslim population here in the St. Louis area, (Ilhan, personal communication) but have cultures and practices very different from, say, the Iraqi Muslim community. In fact, most were rarely identified as “Muslim” by the community at large as they tended to be fair skinned and wearing hijab is not part of their religious or cultural practices. Other stereotypes and factors were at work as well. As a former board member for CAIR explained:

It just depends on again on who you are, social status. It’s very difficult for people to identify me as Muslim when they look at me, so I don’t run into the same type of discrimination that some other people that I work with.

One of the aspects that stood out most, in the local reporter’s comments about the ways in which the news presented and in the justifications of fears and reactions was the amount of misunderstanding still present. Her husband, who was from South America, was perceived as “Arab” solely upon the color of his skin. She also noted the ways in which stereotypes were prevalent in local news about the Middle East and “terrorists.” Those she knew in the Muslim community agreed to interviews, but primarily focused upon raising awareness about Islam, and tried to draw little attention to themselves or their own fears. Others seemed less aware of the local Muslim community, but reflected upon changes they had noticed in discourse over the past thirteen years. A local politician expressed some shock when I stated there was a clear shift in language about terrorists from “Arab” to “Muslim” around the mid-2000s. However, he quickly reflected:

Before, they were just thinking Arabs, Arabs are attacking Israel, and Arabs are doing that. Just lumping everyone together when they are different countries and different ethnic groups. Within the Arab community I would not have realized that shift in 2005 that it became "Muslim." That was a function of people looking into why we were attacked, it was some group of Muslims.

This stood out as a very clear example within interviews of the shifting understanding and perception of identities. In the opinion pieces and letters to the editor, the shift in language use and identity articulation was much more gradual. In the words of opinion editorials, letters to the editor, leaders outside the Arab-American Muslim community, as well as in the stories of Muslim Americans about experiences in their communities, it was clear that there was still a good deal of misunderstanding about who Muslims are and what they believe.

***Quelling anger, appealing to reason—And positioning ourselves.*** In the days immediately following September 11, 2001, a number of opinion editorials were published with no bylines given. This is something of note, as in the thirteen years I analyzed, this period of several months in 2001 and again in 2006-2007 were the only times no self positioning markers were given to opinion pieces. The reasoning behind this is unclear. Perhaps it was to protect the authors or to project an attitude of unity among newspaper staff at a time when tempers ran high and violence against Muslims was drawing great concern. However, all of the opinion pieces during this time seemed to focus the discussion on two issues: 1) a disturbing trend of violence against Arabs, Muslims and those perceived to be Arab and Muslim in the United States and 2) the desire to retaliate, which many Americans were expressing. These articles, at least

initially, utilized language of unity and appealed to images of other historic events and lessons.

In “Misguided ‘Patriots’” (2001, September 14), the author drew upon the images of Pearl Harbor and the subsequent relocation and imprisonment of many Japanese Americans. They stated, “The urge to retaliate is powerful. But just as it was in 1941, that impulse is misplaced when it is directed at our fellow Americans” (para. 2). The editorial then talked about threats made against a local mosque, threats made against Arab American high school students, bullets breaking windows at a mosque in Texas, and beatings in New York, Washington and California. The author chastised further saying:

That mindless response by misguided ‘patriots’ amplifies and extends the evil done by terrorists. It divides us on the basis of race or religion at a time when Americans should be united. It delivers a victory that terrorists were powerless to achieve on their own (para. 4).

He went on to evoke other images, this time of the immigrant ancestors many in St. Louis so proudly proclaim. “Americans of Arab descents are just as American as those who came from Ireland, or England or Germany” (para. 6). He called those who perpetrate hate “un-American,” not going so far as to use the pronouns “us” and “them” to distinguish between those like himself and those committing violence, but he drew a clear distinction between groups nonetheless. At the end, the author referred to those who beat others and proclaimed threats as “they,” which drew a firmer linguistic line between his argument and the actions he was condemning.

“Teaching Tolerance” (2001, September 15), an editorial which was printed on

the following day, focused attention on positive approaches being used in area schools, rather than chastising those acting in violence. A school district in the metropolitan area was praised for the work of their school superintendent who “told his staff to help students comprehend the tragedy in the context of growing up in a global community” (para. 2). This particular school district served a very diverse group of students, representing 40 different native languages and a wide range of religious beliefs. Another school superintendent, this time from the north and northeast metropolitan area, was praised for having his students write letters of support to students attending a Muslim day school in the area. The author again reminded the readers that there had been violence and concern in the city, as he explained the day school had to close for the week following threats against teachers and students there (para. 4). He returned, however, to the chastisement approach here, evoking images of slavery, and a time when “whites took their children to witness lynching of blacks. We're past that,” he states confidently, though reminds the reader, “but not entirely past prejudice or mistreatment of fellow Americans because of their religion, where they were born or the color of their skin.” The article finished with a call to just action: “Now is the time to teach children that to be an American is to stand up for freedom and justice, not vigilantism” (para. 5).

This focus on reason, common sense, and justice reverberated in the community interviews as well. The doctor-blogger told me of his blogging efforts,

It shows in my tone that I'm demonstrating more common sense because I am so angry for the **lack** of common sense. People that could be a potential audience are not going to feel any stronger when you express how frustrated you are,

because usually there are people who have common sense and these things do not get them to agitate. So, I try to maintain a reasonable tone.

Within two days of “Teaching tolerance,” unknown editorial writers used the images of internment camps, immigrant family roots, and slavery to evoke both shame and pride in how far the nation has come and in order to discourage violence and encourage social justice.

This tone and style changed drastically when the next editorial was printed two days later. “A different kind of war,” (2001, September 17) instead took on the mantle and language not of unity, but of combat and rising fears. Nonetheless, an unknown author returned the reader to President Bush’s earlier words and message, stating, “a war against Islamic terrorists is not a war against Islam. Bin Laden's religious justification for terrorism is far outside the mainstream of Muslim theology” (para. 5). The tone fed on fear as the author also stated, “The United States must not paint the enemy with a broad brush and drive moderate Muslims into bin Laden's arms” (para. 5). This indicated the author believed there are only careful words separating “moderate” Muslims from radicals and violent action.

In the paragraph that followed, the focus was upon making people feel safer by capturing and killing bin Laden. This comfort was taken away as a fairly unknown U.S. born Egyptian with ties to another bomber was quoted as saying, “tomorrow you will get somebody else. His name will be different . . . (but) it's not going to end” (para. 6). It was then even more disturbing that the article ended with a quote from the President vowing war “where we can't be certain we'll ever get to a V-J Day” (para. 9). Two sides threatening war and “wiping out” (para. 7) each other, only seems to escalate

tension and fear here through their use of both emotive adjectives and verbs that draw upon images of violence and war.

The fourth editorial in this period, titled “Clash of Symbols” (2001, Sept 19) returned in style to that of the first two, again condemning those who acted in violence. It also attempted to even chastise those who take on the emotive language of war imagery. Specifically, the second paragraph began, “those responsible for the assaults apparently believed they were sticking up for America. Instead, they were trashing it. They struck out in ignorant rage at symbolic targets. In so doing, they furthered the aim of our terrorist enemies.” Here, emotive verbs and adjectives were again used but focused upon condemning violent acts of both “terrorists” and those displaying “ignorant rage” at the general Muslim population. The author explained that CAIR had hundreds of attacks or threats reported and had verified 350 in the week since 9/11. Beyond this, the FBI had also been investigating over 40 hate crimes, including a murder in Arizona and a murder in Texas (para. 3). This particular editorial stands out from others because the author showed greater awareness of the broader discourse and its implications. For example, he praised President Bush for visiting a mosque and reading from the Qur’an (para. 6), indicated that this was a necessary mea culpa for words uttered the previous day. These particular words could have incited greater violence from terrorists, although might have gone unnoticed to many Americans in the escalating rhetoric and war imagery then present. The author carefully pointed out these words and used historical events and newer language to illustrate the power and danger of the president’s chosen words.



Trying to rally the American people Sunday, Mr. Bush warned: "This crusade, this war on terrorism is going to take a while." Tuesday, Mr. Bush apologized for his poor word choice, as well he might have. It may be that many in the West no longer remember what the word "crusade" means. But in the Arab and Muslim world, those centuries-long religious wars have not yet been forgotten. They were the equivalent of Christian jihads (para. 5).

While the word "jihad" was often used to evoke fear most often in 2001, it served a different purpose here. Having emerged into American understanding almost immediately following 9/11, "jihad" was seen and understood as violent, religious and intolerant. Illustrating the power of loaded language, the author explained within historical contexts how the word "crusade" would be heard by most in the Middle East (para. 6). Appealing again to logic, he concluded by saying, "words, like weapons, are dangerous when they are loaded. It is imperative that Mr. Bush -- and all Americans -- choose them with great care" (para. 7). The remaining articles in this theme seemed to take up this concern and echo it again, this time in the letters to the editor.

Almost a week later, a local resident's letter was printed with the title "Don't Let Patriotism Result in Intolerance" (McElyea, 2001). Echoing the first article in this theme, he labeled those who committed these attacks in the name of protecting the U.S. as expressing the "dark side" of "patriotism" (para. 2). However, he began by arguing that patriotism was a good thing. "That feeling is valuable if it is inclusive and if we want to bring the terrorists and their supporters to justice," he stated (para. 1). Something else was accomplished here that has not been noted elsewhere and that was a particularly inclusive discourse. Unlike previous writers who often used the labels

“Arab” or “Muslim” before calling people “American,” this particular writer used the phrase “Americans who are Muslim and of Arabic descent” (para. 2) and “we” to include all who identified as Americans. This, more than any other writing, indicated inclusivity as they were proclaimed Americans first, and members of religious and ethnic groups second. In fact, the final sentence used the inclusive pronoun “we” in speaking of the country. To this point, this was the most inclusive language and framing seen in *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch* opinion editorials.

The last piece in this chronological period, another letter to the editor, reflected national unity, grief and a possible continued tension between particular groups. Speaking on behalf of the National Council of Jewish Women, St. Louis, the Section President (2001) stated, “ it is important to affirm our core beliefs and values” (para.1), and

The 2,200 members of National Council of Jewish Women, St. Louis Section, represent a strong voice and a tradition of advocacy ‘to ensure individual rights for all.’ We speak out now against harassment and violence targeted at Arab-Americans, Muslims and others based on ethnicity or religion (para. 2)

While this clearly did not condone violence, the supportive tone almost seemed to waiver. She further stated that the “economy impact of this tragedy” might mean “more people in need” and that they would be working in collaboration with other agencies to meet this need (para. 3). It was the phrase “working in collaboration with other agencies” that caught my attention. This brought to mind the history of tensions between those supporting Israel here in St. Louis and the tenuous at best approach to the rights of Arab Muslims in that region. Because of this, I read this statement as a re-

positioning, allowing them to verbally and physically support those in need, but from a safe distance. This repositioning out of fear was noted during community interviews as well. An area reporter who has lived in this state most of her life, but has moved to the area within the last ten years told me that she felt there were walls between groups of people:

I think St. Louis is very fragmented. And that the best qualities of St. Louis are also the worst qualities. People here never leave. Most people I've met here are from here and live their whole lives here. Which to me says "this is a great community, people want to stay here." But, when you're not from here it makes it very hard to find your way in. Because people never branch out and they stay basically in the same communities, sometimes in the same neighborhoods, there is a tendency to get very divided in terms of race and class and religion. And those things I think hurt St. Louis which is otherwise really wonderful and welcoming and you know, Midwestern, and all of the best things about the Midwest. People, you know, tend to be very friendly, and even here will answer my calls and invite me into their homes. But, um, there's just some fragmentation and I think it exists not only amongst races and faiths and class but also within the community. You know, St. Charles people think something specific about North St. Louis. People in the city think something specific about St. Charles. And so there's all of these myths that exist in St. Louis that criss-cross each other and none of them are true.

Others were able to sum up their feelings of both insider and outsider standing quickly. Another local politician told me that she had lived here for fifteen years and "I would

say that they are and they're not [welcoming]. They are welcomed as in it's a friendly place, but, there is still, we'll use the word clique, for how long you've known them.”

The positioning here was very interesting, as the speaker never used a “we,” but attempted to stand as an outsider. “They” was used for both the welcoming community and, in another instance “they” also talked about newcomers and outsiders; there was no sense of a “we” here. For some who were deeply interested in the lives and experiences of international residents, they stated that they knew of efforts to welcome those from other countries, but it was unclear as to what was specifically done in this effort. A professor of religious studies at a nearby community college stated:

I know that there is an international institute and ah, they try to help those immigrants in terms of education, getting a job, getting a driver’s license, and housing. I’m not very familiar, exactly how they do it, but I know of them and that helps them, so I assume there is an organization helping them out.

In retrospect, most leaders I interviewed seemed to think of welcoming others as kind words and providing services that helped individuals acclimate to cultural and social expectations of the area. In this way, most believed the community succeeded. Those who defined welcoming as acceptance of different views, experiences, social economic statuses, however, found the St. Louis area to be less welcoming. This seemed to reflect the varied use of “we” in *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch* opinion editorials and letters to the editor as well, as sometimes “we” included all “Americans,” or all local residents and other times authors drew distinctions between Americans and “Muslim Americans.”

*If we [take this action], the terrorists have won—More positioning.* A quick google search for this phrase on August 18, 2012, yielded 68,000,000 hits within .25 seconds. This hopefully gives some indication of how pervasive this discourse became following 9/11. It first appeared nationally sometime in September of 2001 (though it is unclear where and when, exactly, it began or who first used it), and appeared for the first time in The St. Louis Post-Dispatch editorials section on October 21, 2001, in a letter titled “If we yield to fear, the terrorists win.” Sabourin (2001) stated here that he believed the terrorists

would like us to believe that our economy is in jeopardy. They would like us to be suspicious of people who look and pray in a different way than we do. They would like us to open the packages of fear and anxiety and to quickly spread the contents to others.

We cannot allow ourselves to fall into what the terrorists would like us to do.

Our faith in God and country must prevail. (para. 2-3)

Here, he clearly included “we” as Americans those of different faiths and ethnic backgrounds, distinguishing “terrorists” from those in America who identify as Muslim and/or of Arab descent. What is interesting here was the use of the phrase “belief in God and country.” While he was most likely drawing upon phrases such as “In God we Trust,” which can be found on dollar bills across America, it also has the potential of separating those who do not believe in any God from the American “we” he is trying to convey here. It is also interesting that he used the phrase “be suspicious of people who look and pray in a different way than we do.” While he attempted to show unification through the use of “we,” the “we” seemed to be exclusionary of anyone who didn’t

look or pray like he did in closer examination of the discourse. What he accomplished here eventually fell short of what he seemed to aim and hope for.

The best example of why this distinction between Islamic terrorists and Islam is necessary can be found in a series of letters to the editor between October 17 and October 23, 2001. In an article printed first in *The Washington Post* on October 16 and then in *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch* on 17, Mona Charen, a national opinion columnist, called for the expulsion of all Arab visitors from the United States and for “some scrutiny” placed upon all Middle Eastern Americans as well (“Two Fears”). Ibrahim Eshein, a local man, replied within the letters to the editor on October 21, condemning these words as “ridiculous” and countered her by asking, “How can we tell the governments of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and other friendly Arab nations that we are expelling their people while we have thousands of our own soldiers and citizens working in their land?” (“Arabs as Neighbors,” para. 4).

While at first this seemed to be given space for more moderate speech, it was immediately followed in the letters by one that agreed with Mona Charen. In fact, this letter first appealed to realism, as she asked the reader to focus on the events, and the pattern of behavior she saw associated with a particular group and these sorts of events. However, she then utilized even more emotive language than what was employed by Charen. Without a title for this letter, local Virginia Preston (October 21, 2001) began,

We must be realistic. The United States was attacked by Arab Muslims - not Chinese, not Irish, not Sudanese - but Arab Muslims. They lived among us, unsuspected and undetected, for months. While we were helping them get pilot training, they were planning to kill innocent people. Now, while we are busy

being politically correct, many more are living here. It would be incredibly naive not to be suspicious of Arabs in our society (Preston, para. 1-2).

Having these two letters in juxtaposition may have been an attempt to show a lack of bias. However, in the positioning, and previous prominence of Mona Charen's opinion article on the front page, the tone of the piece, the active verb choices and emotive adjectives utilized in both seemed to lean more towards a fearful attitude rather than an unbiased assessment.

In another letter to the editor that responded directly to Mona Charen's editorial, Kansal (2001) presented even in his title that "Targeting Muslims is narrow minded." Much like the previous articles that appeal to reason, he drew on the national memory and family histories, stating

If we ever have an issue with a certain ethnic culture and religion all we need do is look into our family history and see how our ancestors first came to America as minority immigrants.

Every hard-working and peace-loving person in America needs to be protected not only from the terrorists but also from narrow-minded and ill-informed Americans. Most citizens of the planet Earth, regardless of the country they live in, are peace-loving people. We have no right to tag or condemn the Arab Muslims of the globe for this ghastly act of terrorism.

(para. 3-4).

What was most interesting here was that he moved beyond separating Americans who are Muslim and of Arab descent from terrorists. This letter, unlike local discourse from before, went so far as to separate Arab Muslims "of the globe" from terrorists who act

in the name of Islam and come from Arab nations. This is a significant evolution in the way average Americans begin to understand the 9/11 acts of terrorism and their perpetrators. This separation is one that we do begin to see more often in the following articles, though admittedly is not constantly separated in the discourse.

The final three articles in this period, two letters to the editor and one opinion editorial, focused on similar concerns, namely combating misconceptions about immigrants and Muslims and condemning those, like Charen, who spread erroneous information and fear. Khan's letter (2001), as mentioned above, chastised Charen for her shortsightedness and fear. He used statistical evidence as a way to the reader on the basis of rationality: "There are 2 million immigrants/students/visitors in the United States and perhaps 200 terrorists. To deport one terrorist we will have to deport 10,000 innocent people" (para. 3). Instead of focusing all of his ire on Charen as previous writers have done, he turned his frustration on editors of *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch* themselves, exclaiming, "while Charen has a constitutional right to free speech, some **editorial** restraint and thought would be much appreciated" (para. 5).

The chairman of the Islamic Information Center in downtown St. Louis also submitted a harsh critique of both Charen and the editors' tactics, saying,

[T] here is another type of terrorism going unnoticed. It is a terrorism that uses the silent paper and pen. My reference is to those columnists who perpetuate hatred and distrust. They are in no way less harmful than the other type of terrorism...they engage in nothing short of "terrorism in journalism," which needs to be curbed. Your judgment in publishing them needs care (para. 1 & 3).



While community outcry was commendable, as was the bravery to publish something that condemned the very paper publishing it, these words of caution seemed to go somewhat unnoticed, as writers like Charen continued to write words of distrust against Arab Americans and Islam in general the following year.

However, before this shift to finger pointing and escalation of negative rhetoric, there is one more piece that focuses on fighting terrorism and keeping the terrorists from winning. The unknown author of "Getting to know you" (2001) focused on the increase in awareness about Islam and tolerance. "American attitudes have changed -- for the better," (para. 1), claimed the author. Immediately following are the results of a very telling survey.

Pew Research Center for the People & the Press shows that 59 percent of Americans had a favorable view of U.S. Muslims in November, compared to 45 percent in March. Conservative Republicans showed a big change, with 64 percent feeling favorably toward the group, compared to 35 percent in March. At the same time, interest in Islam has grown. The Islamic Information Center in Manchester and the Dar al-Islam mosque in west St. Louis County have received many requests for information. The mosque here and others around the country have opened their doors to people of other faiths in an effort to show the differences between mainstream Islam and the counterfeit version practiced by the terrorists (para. 2-3).

Beyond the change in statistical data represented here, another phenomena appeared for the first time in the discourse. No longer were those who committed crimes on 9/11 referred to as extremists or radicals, but distanced even further in St. Louis print as the

author referred to their practices as the “counterfeit version” of Islam. Strangely enough, there is no explanation here as to what non-counterfeit practices might look like, or what Islam teaches. While mosques in the area were portrayed as open and welcoming, little talk focused on the actual beliefs or practices of Muslims within the article. Instead, there was still talk of harassment and hate crimes occurring, as well as increased racial profiling. In closing, it was no surprise that the author returned to the notion of fighting terrorism, upholding patriotism, the American way, and keeping the terrorists from winning. He stated, “Treating Muslims right helps convey the message to the world that the United States is fighting terrorism, not Islam. It also is an all-American thing to do.” (para. 5). The ability to distinguish between enemy, friend and neighbor seemed to disappear a short time later, however.

***Reprehensible behaviors—And more misunderstanding.*** With the beheading of American journalist Nick Berg and the release of photos from Abu Ghraib prison comes another shift in discourse. This time, the focus seems to be upon who should receive blame for negative outcomes. In a letter to the editor that responded to public outcry over Abu Ghraib and treatment of prisoners there, Wilber (2004) stated that he was outraged even more “at abuse of Americans.” He began to list events from his lifetime and primarily the three prior decades that were associated with Arab and/or Muslim acts against Americans. This included the execution of a wheelchair-bound, retired American on a cruise ship, an American sailor “brutalized” and shot in the head and then the body was dumped onto the tarmac from a hijacked airplane, the torturing of an American embassy employee in Beirut, the Iran hostage crisis, September 11, 2001, and the death of Nick Berg (para. 2). He did acknowledge a belief that the Abu

Ghraib publicity “has served only to cause the death of more Americans” (para. 3).

However, he also said immediately following, “I say fight back using whatever is necessary to crush and destroy our enemies. Strength and a willingness to use it are the only things they understand or respect” (para. 3). This leads the reader to believe that violence is just from the American position, but not from those who may have been relating the news from Abu Ghraib.

Also in these articles from 2004, I began to see the shift towards “Arab” and misunderstanding “Muslim” as a single term, almost without showing distinction between the two at times (Wilber, 2004; Taub, 2004). At this point, James Hacking III, of the Council on American-Islamic Relations of St. Louis began to speak out saying that “Muslims here deplore the killing” (2004, May 13). He condemned the murder of Nick Berg (the journalist who was beheaded on camera) by those who claimed to be Muslim, but stated that these actions did not accurately represent the sentiments of most of the world’s 1.2 billion Muslims (para. 2).

While one local writer argued that it is the press that brought on the beheading through their coverage of the Abu Ghraib scandal (Ray, 2004), another claimed that the media presentation of ire raised in the ‘Arab World’ is very one-sided. “Where was the outrage by the Arab world when 9-11 occurred? And where is the outrage at the pictures of a beheaded American civilian?”(Taub, 2004). This perceived silence and failure to denounce violent actions in the Arab world is important, and one that writers return to years later (Friedman, 2010).

Others editorials, like those written by local author and journalist Sylvester Brown (2005) did give counter-narratives and began to tell their personal stories of

positive encounters with Muslim co-workers and neighbors, encouraging others to explore the Qur'an and talk about holidays such as Ramadan. Unfortunately, 2006 showed a much less hospitable climate.

***Growing violence, more misunderstanding & mis-ascribing of Muslim***

***identity.*** As the nation entered into the year that would mark five years since the terrorist attacks, discourse again reflected fear and growing hostility towards those believed to be Muslim. On January 10, 2006: “Muslim Bashing Seemingly in Vogue” by Adam Jadhav stated, “It’s become sort of a hybrid enemy image, like it or not. We may say we have no issue with Islam, but we do fear terrorists and we do see opponents that are from the Middle East,” he quoted Nancy Snow, an adjunct professor of political communication at University of Southern California, as saying. He then went on to quote others who talked about how the framing of this war on terror has re-shaped our language.

“The word ‘ayatollah’ has entered our American lexicon—when you label someone an ayatollah you label someone intolerant or cruel,” said Kenneth Cuno, director of the Program in South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies at the U of I. ‘The word ‘jihad’—if you don’t like what I’m doing, you might say I’m waging a jihad against X, Y, or Z. This association with Islam and terrorism, its part of the same phenomenon,’ Cuno added.

Jadhav ended by saying, “though some racist images—the drunk Irishman or the rich Jew—are largely understood to be wrong and hurtful, it appears Muslims and Arabs, in today’s world, aren’t yet off limits.” What was most striking here were the echoes of Suarez-Orozco (2001) and others’ work. This discourse claiming the

mythical 'perfect' assimilation of European immigrants could be stripped away to reveal a much less accepting society of the past, as other negative stereotypes were eventually discarded.

Similar echoes appeared in the community interviews as well. One of the local politicians stated as we talked about life and attitudes before and after 9/11,

Nobody ever said anything about, "Oh, did you know he's an Arab?" or a Muslim. I never thought Muslim; if I was thinking something it would have been Arab. I didn't make the Muslim connection. I really wasn't into it. After 9/11, that all changed. Then you start thinking, "Oh, gosh." You noticed, and you started to notice. Now did it change the way I behaved? No, not really. I mean, I was still friendly and still talked to them...I haven't seen anybody; I haven't heard anybody make an comments about Muslims or Arab or anything like that. I think what people have done, here in this community, I can't speak for the world, or the country, or anything like that, but generally, if you know somebody, especially personally, like you go into their store, then you trust them. Am I going to ask them, "Well, do you believe in Sharia law?" I wouldn't ask Jewish person, "are you Orthodox" or something like that. But on the other hand, none of the Jews are blowing up airplanes or doing any of the stuff that they [Muslims] are doing.

In another portion of the interview, he again referred to Sharia law, stating

People are thinking, do we need to look into some of these places and see if they are planning a violent overthrow of America, which of course is treason, but from a personal standpoint, when I look at people in [my neighborhood]. I've

probably seen dozens and dozens of Arabs. I just don't think of people that way.

We need to be looking into Sharia Law. It treats women like third class citizens.

It violates our Constitution.

It was interesting that first he framed the discussion as the newspapers and letters to the editors had in 1999-2000 and 2009-present. "Arabs are attacking Israel." Since Sharia Law pertains only to particular countries under Islamic governments, it cannot violate our constitution; it has no place here, nor do Muslims (radical or otherwise) claim that it has a place within American system.

Perhaps the most intriguing opinion editorial of 2006 was one covering a local news event ("Preaching hate," 2006, November 8). The writer told of a Baptist gathering that preached both misinformation about Muslims and hatred of Muslims in general. Gulden Ilhan, a professor at St. Louis Community College-Meramec in the areas of World Religions and Ethics not only condemned the actions of the militant, but also condemned those in a Baptist sect spewing hatred and telling congregation members that Muslims would convert them by force or revert to killing them. As a Muslim herself, she immediately countered the words that she has heard and asked others (in a roundabout way) to disregard sources that did not have credible training on the Qur'an and/or lacked connection to individuals within the Muslim community.

As in the previous 10 years analyzed here, fear seemed to dictate the direction of the discourse from all sides; Americans not familiar with Islam were afraid of those who "looked" Muslim and might be radical, while those who identified as Muslim were afraid, or so it seemed to non-Muslim friends, to voice anything other than confidence in acceptance. This was articulated well across a number of community member

interviews. The local reporter told me the story of interacting with one of her interview participants:

[S]he came from Afghanistan. And she has a really interesting story. But, when I asked her this question, she sort of just, I was still reporting about race but before I was doing things about immigration, I asked her how she was treated you know, coming here, and she came here under refugee status. And she said "It's fine. Everything is fine." And when I did the stories about the Muslims in the community, I heard the same answers, "It's fine. Everything is fine. We are treated just fine." And you know, I don't feel like it's my job to, you know, yell and scream at people and go, "well that's not possible", but I also feel like I have to be skeptical and that includes me saying, "really?" So, I went home after several of these interviews and the process of writing these stories about the Muslims in St. Louis and was just baffled, and I said to my husband, who is an American citizen but wasn't at the time, "this is so frustrating because I don't think I'm hearing the truth." And he said, "They're afraid to tell you the truth because they come from different places." And I knew that, but he just saw it very clearly.

So, I spoke with the woman named Melinda and she was on my story and she was a convert. And she is actually Latina. And so she, you know, is born and raised in New York and Miami, has no problem saying what she thinks, and says that people are afraid. You know, they come from cultures where you don't speak up, and if you do, you maybe disappear. And there's a sense of wanting to belong and fit in. So, you know, I think that people at least take a second look. I

have heard of people being treated poorly. Of tires being slashed and things like that but as a reporter it's really hard for me to get people to talk about those things.

As I spoke with the doctor-blogger on this topic, he joked about the fear of those outside the immediate community who voiced interest in the experiences of Arab-American Muslims post-9/11. "Most people would not worry that you are there to convert them. They would probably worry, 'are you working for the FBI?'"

Whether or not the fear of each other was justified or not, it became very clear during the community interviews that 9/11 had profoundly impacted individuals in St. Louis. The local reporter was quick to voice concerns about those in her profession:

I think they impacted everybody's lives in terms of Muslims because they brought them into the headlines and the spotlight in a way that was very generalizing and I think that the media did not do its job in unpacking, you know... The media did not do a good job in unpacking all of the issues that can help people understand who Muslims are, who they aren't, how diverse they are, how they are as diverse if not more than Christians. I mean, if I were to tell you I was a Christian I would tell you barely anything about me. You know, and it gets so much more specific. And so I think that they brought Muslims into everyone's mind. And most in a very negative way. So that has to affect people. I can't imagine how it doesn't. How they choose to let that impact them is another story.



The doctor-blogger talked about the lengths some within the Arab-American Muslim community within particular social economic statuses and positions had gone to in order to not be noticed:

I mean, the fear that a lot of people had of being targeted, whether real or perceived, the pressure that got some people actually to end up calling themselves by a different name. If they are called Mohammed they might end up going by the name John in the hourly pay job that they are in and hoping that somebody is going to confuse them with a Hispanic or, you know, Eastern European, or you know whatever. I mean, these fears are real.

Clearly, for many this time in 2006 was a time of fear, while for others in positions with more power, it was a time to counter misunderstandings and hatred. Unfortunately, some of that fear and hatred can still be seen in the community interviews conducted five years later.

***Returning the Israel/Palestinian conflict to focus.*** As The St. Louis Post-Dispatch joined the digital age, 2007 and 2008 reflected a time where few local editorials were printed, and replaced them instead with associated press and syndicated column editorials. After an entire year in 2008 without any letters to the editor or opinion articles related to local discourse on Arabs and Muslims, on January 7, 2009, three more letters to the editor were printed dealing with the Israel-Palestinian conflict. In contrast to those printed in 1999 and 2000, two of the three articles were in support of the Palestinian people, although the acts of the militant Islamic group, Hamas, were condemned (Ghafoor, 2009; Solomon, 2009).

Unfortunately, this tempered speech did not quell all of the negative and sometimes erroneous editorials that followed. In 2010, a New York Times writer Thomas L. Friedman wrote “Father Knows Best Terrorism,” and it was reprinted in *The St. Louis Post Dispatch*. While not written by anyone local, the ire and horrible misrepresentations presented here should not go unaddressed. In this opinion editorial alone, the term “jihadist” was used 6 times, which represents three-fourths of the instances in the 11-year period. “Arab” was used 4 times and each time it was immediately or almost immediately followed by the word “Muslim.” “Muslim” was used in 5 additional contexts, in connection with the terms “opponents,” “infidels,” “parents, spiritual leaders and political leaders,” “young [suicide bombers]” and in a quote from the associated press talking about jihad.

As we have seen before, the misunderstandings, positioning and improper ascription of identities continued well into 2010. The overall scope of the opinion editorial focused on improving US intelligence, and preventing the creation of suicide bombers instead of simply catching them. However, it was the shape of the discourse that was most interesting, always connecting “Arab” to “Muslim” (though not the other way around) and almost always referring to the suicide bombers as “jihadists;” this leaves the reader with the assumption that suicide bombers who call themselves Muslims are the only threat to our security systems. These terms were used repeatedly and with little distinction made between the differences therein. Ten years after September 11, 2001, and the writing appeared more fearful and less careful than in several years previous, as it spread misunderstanding about terrorism, who carried it out, and the general attitude and actions of most Muslims. For instance, it should be

noted that while the young man was portrayed as an Arab “jihadist,” he had been raised in North Africa, in a non-Arabic speaking country, and his own father, who was also a Muslim, was concerned enough by his actions to alert the police.

**Conclusion: The “Big Picture” Issues Connecting Local Discourse to Narratives**

How was the Arab-American Muslim population represented in local St. Louis media between 1999 and 2011? What was the discourse by community leaders, Muslim and non-Muslim, about the Arab-American Muslim population in St. Louis? The local politician who ran as a Democrat perhaps stated it best when she said,

I think they are looked upon more in as a threat and a concern of a threat, and then unfortunately with the perceived threat of Muslim Americans I think there is more fear and animosity towards them as a group.

As findings illustrate, the initial response is that Arab-Americans and/or Muslims are misrepresented often in text and misunderstood by many in the community. This was present well before September 11, 2001, as newspaper data collected from 1999 has shown. Misunderstandings about what Muslims believed and practiced were in abundance, from the opinion pieces on the Israeli and Palestinian conflicts to community members’ discussion of Sharia law and faith practices. Positioning of “us,” “them” and “we,” as articulated in the opinion pieces and community interviews as well showed a level of fear surrounding Arab-Americans and Muslims alike, especially those within the local community. Lastly, the mis-ascribing of identities was seen in the ways individuals perceived as being members of the community were approached and in generalizations made about the Arab-American and/or Muslim communities by those on the outside looking in. Fear, misunderstanding and misrepresentations of

identity frame the St. Louis context for many Muslims. Misunderstandings, positioning and misrepresentation are themes that all four core narrative participants seem most anxious to address, as you will see in the following chapters.

### **III Intertwining and Extrapolating Four Narrated Lives**

In the following pages, I will introduce the core participants as I share their life stories over four chapters. I begin in this brief overview with an introduction of all four women, Ashley, Rose, Hannah and Amira, as a way to share a little bit about who they are, what they have in common, and where their stories will take us. Keep in mind throughout that these are pseudonyms, as are names given to family members, friends, and even places, in an effort to protect the identities of those involved.

Three of the four women I met through academic connections at the university where I study, and the fourth was located through the public university professor that I interviewed. Immediately this indicates the strong ties to education all of the participants had at the time and perhaps indicates a slight bias to this research. However, as we spoke, all of them also talked about parental expectations for education and pressure that they felt from their cultures to be highly educated, a theme that I discuss in each narrative, among the others listed below.

While Ashley was a more recent transplant to the St. Louis area, Hannah and Amira had spent most of their lives here (See table III-1). They grew up nearby, attending college elsewhere and moving around some in their early twenties, but returning here during their emerging adulthood periods. While Hannah had not spent her childhood here, she'd been in the area for over a decade and assimilated well into the local culture. In sum, this particular place and context was essential to all the narratives, though experiences were diverse. Looking at the individual life narratives and pathways, the themes found across all four women were:

1. Misunderstandings: These were abundant, hurtful and often something that would challenge participants and drive them to speak out.
2. Assimilation: often their stories illustrated ways in which they navigated in-betweenness and bicultural identities
3. Emerging Adulthood: For each of the participants, late adolescence to early adulthood was a time of change and self exploration.
4. Generativity: Similar to McAdam's (2006) findings on generative adults, participants told stories of how they had blessed childhoods, and yet also noticed and acknowledged struggles of those around them, leading to their own participation in community leadership roles.
5. Familial Ties: In identity development, assimilation practices and in community leadership, parents and other family members served as models for participants and played integral roles in the telling of their stories.

(See Table III-1 for more detail). While these similarities are addressed more in the following pages, it is also interesting to see how different contexts, experiences, people and even the slight differences in ages and therefore historical events and understandings help shape each one. An outline of each story can also be found in Appendix I. These provide titles of each kernel story, a timeline for when each occurred, the theme or genre for each, and the corresponding line number from the transcript.

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Cultural Identity</b>	<b>Area of Origin</b>
<b>Ashley</b>	29/30	Teacher Educator	Finishing a PhD	American/Turkish	Georgia (U.S.)
<b>Hannah</b>	33	Pre-K aid/ Biochemist	Associate's/ Finishing Bachelor's degree	Iraqi/ American	Iraq
<b>Rose</b>	29	Disease Control Specialist/ Educator	Graduate degree	Syrian/American	St. Louis Metro
<b>Amira</b>	33	Music Educator	Graduate degree	Egyptian/American	St. Louis Metro

**Table III-1: Core Participant Data****Ashley**

I choose to begin with Ashley because in many ways, she's a bit of an outlier and is not perceived by society as a Muslim or from an immigrant background as quickly as the others. Having only one immigrant parent, and growing up bicultural in the southern United States, it is not very surprising that she identifies first and foremost as American and "White." Living in in-between identities is not as salient in her story at first glance as it is with several of the others. She does not wear hijab (nor do most Turkish women) and does not speak Arabic, putting her within a different cultural context than what other core participants experienced. Also, having lived in St. Louis for a little over three years, she's also spent the least amount of time here and has few family ties in the area, though it is clear in her narrative that her familial ties, especially to her mother and brother, are very strong.

It was her bicultural identity development or growing sense of "in-betweenness" during adolescence and emerging adulthood that were the central foci of many kernel

stories within her narrative. She continuously stated her connections to her American and Turkish families. Specifically, she narrated about her time spent in Georgia and time spent in Boyabatt and Istanbul, her upbringing in the Baptist church and discovery of Islam, and all of these are given time and space in her life story telling. Her assertion of coming into an adult identity through an emerging adulthood stage also is something she shares in common with other participants. Her story illustrates diversity within the faith, even within women approximately the same age and in the same city.

### **Intertwining Threads Between Researcher and Participant**

I'd known Ashley for nearly a year when I first found out that she was a follower of Islam. Working together as research assistants, we'd attended numerous meetings, outings, classes, and even had several long discussions in the car as we went to and from research sites outside of town. I knew that she spoke not only English and Spanish, but Turkish as well and that her mother was a Turkish immigrant. Foreign language and learning a second language was something we'd talked about fairly often as we both had former 'careers' in Teaching English as a Second Language. I'd also been pretty vocal about my dissertation research interests as I'd tried to better focus and articulate where I wanted to go with them.

It wasn't until one evening in late April as we munched on some pork spring rolls and sipped a glass of wine that she said she was really breaking her religious beliefs. I was a bit shocked when she simply said, "Well, yeah, I'm Muslim." She didn't dress in hijab as some did, nor did her vocabulary or actions reflect that which I'd seen many others carry out. As a Turkish American, late twenties and Muslim, she fit perfectly within the demographics of those I wanted to speak with, and yet I never



would have guessed any of this unless she had told me. For someone with a ‘Caucasian’ appearance and even some background in attending a Baptist church, I quickly became curious as to what made her choose to identify with her Turkish ethnic roots and to become Muslim—and, even more interestingly, when and how these decisions came about. When presented with an opportunity to interview her, then, I was anxious to do so, and to find out in what ways she connected to her Turkish and Islamic identities. As we were both enrolled in a human development course at the time and exploring lifespan narratives, we agreed to interview each other for the final project. I set a date with her to meet for coffee at Panera Bread just a few blocks from her house.

#### **“I Like America AND Turkey”: Ashley’s Story**

I arrived a little early and grab a giant cookie and pumpkin spice latte. I knew Ashley lived only a short distance away, and that even though she’d called to say she’d be a bit late, it wouldn’t be very long. I settled in at one of the outdoor tables, as the weather is still fairly nice (though a bit overcast) and the volume level was less than it seems to be indoors. She called me again to let me know parking is hard to come by and she was driving around to find a spot. She found one soon after calling and walked up shortly after, looking a bit tired but with a big smile on her face.

I made sure all of the paperwork was in order and she suggested that we make sure the microphone would pick up the conversation well enough. We chatted for a couple of minutes about random graduate school duties, and then begin the work of constructing her life story around a few simple guiding questions that I asked, such as “Where were you born? When did your mother arrive in the US? What was your early

childhood like? Who did you hang out with? How often did you visit Turkey?”

Luckily, Ashley had plenty to say despite her tiredness. After only two years in the Midwest, though, her southern accent was still fairly clear and made even more so by her exhaustion. As I asked her to begin describing herself, she began by stating,

I’m from Georgia, from the south, but my mom is from Turkey. I guess I grew up pretty much in a small town, a small southern town, but always had that Turkish connection because we visited Turkey and spent a lot of time there. Umm, what else? Oh! I’m 29, and I’ll be 30 in March. As we just talked about, like, emerging adulthood, I’m pretty comfortable with being an adult now, I think. I’m an adult now, I’ll just come out and say it! (lines 15-25).

What struck me about the start of this exchange is how articulate she was in mapping the tensions she lived in. First, she talked about her identity within places and spaces. She said at first that she’s “from Georgia,” and then the language shifted a bit as she talked about being connected to her small town, but also connected to her Turkish roots and family. There was also another important element at work here as well: stage of development. Ashley had spent most of her twenties traveling around for college, graduate school, and then teaching English for two years in Turkey, where she met her husband. At the time of our first interview, she’d been married less than a year before and had undergone a great transition from single, independent and very much an “emerging adult” (Arnett, 2000) in search of identities, to married and depended upon greatly by her husband who was a year ahead of her in a doctoral program. We’d talked a lot in that first year about adjusting to doctoral student life and then into the role of “wife.” I’d been married for five years at the time and was adjusting to a new

role myself during that time—that of mother. For both of us, talking about emerging adulthood and the opportunities and stress it brought to our lives, I think, made us both very thankful to be in the more stable phase of adulthood.

At this point, she paused and asked me “what else should I tell?” I reminded her that, really, this was the first interview and though I knew more, I’d like her to talk to me as if this was really our first meeting. Then I gently mentioned that she might want to talk a bit about being in graduate school. This, of course, looped back to a discussion of what brought her to the area in the first place. “Oh!” she remarked, and began again. “I’m a PhD student, studying Educational Psychology and I moved to St. Louis because my husband, who was my fiancée at the time, started at a nearby university, so then I applied to SUMSC (State University in Mid-Sized City) and started school there.”

I asked her how she met her husband, and her face lit up with a big smile. She was still excited to talk about her experiences teaching in Turkey and meeting Kai there.

When I was studying applied linguistics and teaching English as a second language, I wanted to move to Turkey and teach English there. I applied for a job. I went to this big conference, TESOL [Teachers of English as a Second Language] conference, and there was an employment booth and there was somebody from a Mid-sized University in Turkey, in Istanbul, Turkey. That was the only person from Turkey who was taking applications, so I applied and then never heard anything back and finally I emailed that person and they

emailed me back. They were like, “ A) do you want a job and B) something else” and I was like, “A) yes, and I replied B) yes.”

So I got a job there, and the first year, you know, I just spent a lot of time with my grandma, and going to her house in Istanbul. I was thinking about coming back to the states, just you know after one year? But I decided to stay another year and then around, I guess like maybe it was in like January of the second year that I was working there I met Kai. He was a Masters student at the same school. So we met and started dating. I told him that I’m a serious type of girl and I don’t want to waste time and play around. I think he liked that so he introduced me to his family. We went to his little nephew’s birthday party, and that’s kind of a big deal. You know, people don’t introduce you to the family unless they’re real serious about you, too. I feel like it’s more of a big deal in Turkey to meet the family than it is here.

I met his family and then umm I knew he was applying for schools here in the states, and I also wanted to study PhD, so that was something we really had in common and we both wanted to study and he’d already been applying to all these schools and finally he got accepted to one here, so I actually went back home to Georgia and just stayed there for another year, while he came [to the Midwest]. We kept our relationship going, trying to just keep it going long distance, and finally you know, I got accepted here and it worked out. After I had been here like six months, that winter of 2009, we got married in Turkey” (lines 37-75).

From this point, I turned the conversation to the beginning of her story, or as close to it as I hope we could get: the story of where her parents were from and how they met.

My dad's from Georgia, from the small town of Cartown, Georgia. It's really small. And his mom is from Germany, so my grandparents--my paternal grandparents met in Germany at the end of WWII, so I think my dad was open to different cultures because he grew up in a small town and he, you know, his mom was from another country where they, in that small town, didn't have many international people, so I guess when he went to the University of Georgia and he met my mom, he was more open to, you know, marrying someone from another country" (lines 78-84).

I clarified, " your mom is Turkish and your husband is Turkish but your father is American and you grew up in Georgia, so how do you identify yourself?" She stated without any hesitance, "American. Turkish-American. Because I grew up here in the south and really didn't get to the Turkish identity part until I got older. I felt like I was just a regular American kid. I didn't have that distinctive identity until I got older."

Thinking this was a good point to really begin her story, I asked her to tell me about her childhood. "That's a long story, Emily!" she said, laughing. I love the way in which she began to weave together memories here, stories from her parents and grandparents, stories of how visiting Turkey really stand out in her mind as it was a wholly different experience for her than everyday life in her small town.

The first time I went to Turkey, I was two. I don't remember that trip. I just remember stories, like from my family. They would tell me stories, tell me that I was really shy. I didn't want my uncles to bother me or touch me and they would try to smile at me and, you know, I would cry and my brother would play with them and have fun, but I was maybe too like. It took me awhile to get used to having a lot of people around. That's what my parents, er my mom told me. But I do remember my mom's father. My grandpa.

He was a Colonel in the Turkish military, so their house was really close to where his last station was. He used to take me to the commissary where the soldiers are, and you can buy groceries and stuff, and there's all these soldiers guarding stuff and he used to take me with him. I remember the soldiers would pinch my cheeks and thought I was so cute. They would ask me, 'Do you like America better, or do you like Turkey better?' and I would say 'I like **both.**' I was already thinking that way, you know? I didn't want to choose between one or the other. I really remember that experience. A lot of people used to ask me in Turkey when I was little 'cause they knew I was from America but my mom was Turkish, they would always ask me, "do you like America better, or do you like Turkey better?" and I would say, "I like America AND Turkey" (lines 125-151).

Despite her earlier assurances that she didn't really connect with her Turkish roots until she was older, I was already sensing that she knew at three that both parts of herself were important to hold onto and to understand. Perhaps it was very visible in retrospect, or perhaps it had more to do with where the encounter took place. As she

reflected back now, she understood her experiences to be bicultural, a dual identity of sorts, and so it seemed that these early formative experience stood out more as essential to understanding her sense of self. She told another story, of sitting on the bus in crowded, busy, and industrial Istanbul, looking out the window, seeing a lot of trees, and exclaiming to her Grandma, “Look, Grandma! Look! America!” To her, her life in Georgia was all about trees, or at least it was when she was five. “She always thought that was so funny because I associated, like, the trees with back home, and I would say ‘that’s America!’” (lines 159-164).

As we had talked in the past about how her grandmother only spoke Turkish, I suddenly realized this and asked her if she told this to her Grandmother in Turkish or in English. A bit surprised herself, realizing that she was only four or five at this time, she exclaimed,

In Turkish! So I don’t remember **learning** Turkish. The only memory I have of actually learning Turkish is I used to pull my mom’s skirt and say, ‘Mom! What are they saying?’ but I also remember being able to talk to people. I don’t remember this, but my grandma told me, like I would switch to English to talk to my mom, and I would say, “Grandma, I’m gonna speak in American now” (lines 166-178).

It was interesting to note here that her mom, who spoke Turkish fluently and as her first language, primarily spoke to both Ashley and her brother in English, even while in Turkey. “I’m not sure why,” Ashley remarks.

I think she felt like it was easier to speak to us in English. I mean she studied and was fluent in English and, well, I mean she talked with us in Turkish more

when we got older. But I think, like, when you're little and you spend a lot of time in Turkey, with Turkish people, you just learn it (lines 189-193).

As we talked and she reflected more on language learning, though, she realized that her dad played a major role in developing a love of the Turkish language.

My dad actually encouraged us to speak Turkish and he also learned some Turkish. He used to tell us that he didn't learn much German and he regretted not knowing his mother's language so he sacrificed a lot to send us to Turkey in the summers while he remained in Georgia working full time. I think if it weren't for my dad, I would have been a completely different person (personal correspondence).

Her father's family history and their loss of language seemed to instill in him a sense that developing and maintaining that heritage language was essential to their understanding of themselves.

My dad's mom really focused on assimilating to life in the U.S. because it was just after WWII. They did go back and visit Germany 3 times as a family and my dad always talked about what a wonderful experience that was. He was just sad that he couldn't speak more German. So my dad wanted to make sure that we visited our family in Turkey and learned about Turkish language and culture. Unfortunately, we never got to go on a family trip to Turkey all four of us together. My dad always understood me and helped me to understand myself and become happy and proud of my American and Turkish heritage" (personal correspondence).

In discussing her visits to Turkey, she said,



The first time I went, I was two and was probably hearing stuff, and the second time I went, I was probably three. And then we went again when I was five so a lot of those memories and exchanges are from when I was five (lines 195-197).

Later, I asked her to reflect a little bit on how knowing Turkish enriched her life. She told me,

Being able to speak Turkish enriches my life in so many ways. When I was a little girl, during my visits to Turkey, we spent a lot of time at my Anneanne's (grandma's) summer place in a town called Anamur. There were lots of little kids my age in the same summer home complex and I was able to play with them and make friendships. I don't remember learning Turkish but I'm sure I learned a lot from playing with them.

Knowing Turkish helped me to develop close relationships with my family, especially with my Anneanne. She is such a wonderful caring person and has taught me many things throughout my life. I have close relationships with my aunt and uncles and my cousins and also extended family. All those family relationships are so important to me, and knowing Turkish simply strengthens them.

When I talk to my mom on the phone for example it's nice to say Annecim (my dear mother) and she says Ashcim (my dear Ash)-Turkish is all about relationships

My husband and I speak Turkish all the time and there are lots of nice things we say to each other in Turkish that I might miss if I didn't know it! There are lots

of funny things we talk about with each other and friends in Turkish that wouldn't be the same in English.

I like reading Turkish newspapers and books, watching Turkish movies, and T.V. series. I write emails to my family members and communicate long distance. All of these things enrich my life and make me happy" (personal correspondence).

In essence, Turkish is a big part of the ways in which she sees, hears and feels the world around her. Her story, in essence, pulls me back to a difficult time in my life. I had just moved to the Midwest from Toronto, Canada in sixth grade, and had not made a very good impression. My accent brought ridicule, and the students also kept asking me if I had sled dogs or had lived in an Igloo. One of the few bright spots for me, however, was an exchange student from Brazil who also seemed to feel isolated. I didn't speak Portuguese and she struggled a bit with English, not to mention the fact that other students teased her about her accent. Together, on the playground, we spoke in French. It was the language that unified us, build relationship, kept us from being so isolated and yet also kept us distinct, separated from the harsh criticisms of those who were accepted into the majority. In this way, to an extent, I knew how Ashley felt about Turkish, and it made me wish and long for a separate language and culture I could share with my parents and grandparents at times. Though, as I think about it, perhaps the language we share as part of our faith serves in this very capacity for us, to unite and strengthen our relationship as a family.

As she kept telling her story, it was interesting to see the way in which formal education begins to take time away from her cultural education.

Our visits to Turkey kept getting shorter and shorter, and farther in between.

We used to go and stay the whole summer. Let's see. We went when I was two, maybe three, then five, then seven, and then I didn't go again until I was fourteen, so a long time, but my grandma came to visit us. I remember she came when I was ten years old. She came to our fifth grade field day.

Everybody was trying to talk with my grandma, and they thought she was so cute and one of the kids, you know, wanted to talk to her. She couldn't speak English and it had been such a long time since I had been to Turkey that I thought I was going to forget Turkish. I told my mom, 'I wonder if I'll still be able to speak Turkish,' and she responded confidently, "you speak. You can speak Turkish. You won't forget it.' It was hard at first, but it did get easier the more I talked to people (lines 206-227).

I wondered aloud at this why her mother didn't speak Turkish with her at that time, to help re-assure her and help her practice.

I think she really tried to help us assimilate to American culture," Ashley stated. "We grew up in a small town, and there weren't many international people. She tells me stories of things like our first Halloween when she was trying to get us with the rest of the kids going trick or treating and she sewed me a pumpkin costume. One of our neighbors that was my brother's really good friend, his mom made him a TIDE box, like a really big box of laundry detergent. She'd use the big box and make his costume out of that. It made my mom laugh. My mom, I guess you would say, was trying to make it an easy transition. She really didn't do the Turkish culture thing until—it's not like she forced anything

on us. She just tried to do what American parents do, as best as she can, I think. For instance, I remember going to church, going to the first Baptist church in our town because, you know, my mom wanted to have somewhere to have a social life, and that's really the place it's starts from. In a small town, you just don't meet people outside of the church activities. She would take my brother and I to church and my dad, he would go on Sundays. We'd sometimes go on Sundays, but mostly the Wednesday night activities and when we used to go to church, I remember it feeling a little, not racial discrimination really, but just like a clique. I didn't go to the same school where the people who went to this church went, and my mom wasn't really probably in the social group with the kids' parents.

I remember going to this 'Girls in Action,' when I was in Kindergarten or so. It was every Wednesday and was kind of like a bible study for little kids. The girls would be in one group and they would have the boys in the other group. I remember the adults would have their bible study in a big auditorium place. My mom would go to her bible study, and I'd pretend to go to Girls in Action. I would walk around the church, like, just walking around looking at things. I don't know. I just wouldn't go into the Girls in Action thing. I felt like I wasn't part of the group or something, so I would just skip it.

There were things she couldn't change, though. There was this sort of culture clash in her, a way of being that wasn't completely American. The best example I can give is the way she'd communicate with us. You know, in America, we can just say things upfront, say what we mean. She's more

conscious of her words, and the Turkish way seems to **me** that they feel you don't have to say everything directly, that you should understand everything without speaking it all. I didn't get that until much later, like, I never really understood that difference until I got older" (excerpted from lines 230- 346).

After this, we started to talk about her high school experience, as she said this was when she really started to understand things and become more mature.

I think, like, in the beginning of high school, I was still a little bit silly middle school mentality, kind of. But I had a lot of friends and I tried to make friends with people, like everybody. Of course our school had like little social groups or cliques, and I just thought that was so silly! Like, I didn't want to be in any group, I just wanted to be friends with everybody.

I didn't really feel like I was being discriminated against in high school, but I feel like in the small town, you know, things are very church-based. So after a few years with the 'Girls in Action' stuff, you know, I was in the choir with the other kids, but it was like they just didn't accept me or something. I don't mean racially, 'cause I don't think they knew I was racially any different or ethnically any different, but I think they—like kids have their established groups and they'd been together since a very young age and, well, my brother and I eventually said to mom, "can we not go there anymore? We don't want to go there." Especially my brother; he didn't go after a year or two, but I kept going to different things because it was still fun for a lot of things, but later I just said, 'mom, I don't want to go anymore.' But one of my best friends, her dad is a Baptist minister and I used to go with her when I was in high school. I used to

go her church, a different Baptist church, and it was much more welcoming or, I don't know, I just felt more at home. The kids there just seemed more mature and open minded.

Let's see. What else about high school? I was actually the senior class president and I think that was probably because I wanted to, you know, you know, keep from labeling me, like 'oh she's one of that group' or something. So my friends actually put me up to it. They were like, 'you need to be class president.' I'm like, 'I wasn't thinking about that, but...' and that was fun. I thought high school was really fun and actually, almost every summer in high school, I went to Turkey and spent the whole summer there. Maybe just one summer I didn't go. I think my friends kind of thought that it was cool that I went, you know, but it seems like since I didn't stay in the summer I missed the whole "hanging out with friends" and I didn't know what had happened or all the activities going on. I always felt there was a disconnect because during the school year, I would be with my friends, and then in the summer, I'd be like, 'okay. Bye. I'm going to Turkey.' And they thought it was interesting and always wanted to see pictures and ask questions.

I had fun in Turkey, especially because we went to the beach and spent time with family. It was so much fun that I didn't want to come back and, well, I don't know. But the teachers never really asked me that much, maybe in like History class. When something came up about the Ottoman Empire, I would say 'my mom is from Turkey' or maybe make a comment like that, but they never really asked.

For me, college was a complete change. I completely changed. I feel like the bubbly-ness that I had in high school was a little bit toned down and I was just trying to do my studies and get a job and I mean I just had very few friends in college. In high school, you know so many people and you're in that environment and then in college, I just didn't make the effort to be in a sorority or anything. I worked in a computer lab, and that's also where I met my friends. I had one really good friend, Tim, and a friend named Ishmael, and he's from Palestine.

When I worked in the computer lab and I saw him, I thought he might be Turkish, and being at a bigger university and exposed to more international people, I was really curious about meeting more Turkish people and trying to connect to that part of me. Just going to Turkey during the summers, I didn't really make long-term friends there. So when I saw Ali, I was like 'Are you Turkish?' I found myself asking a lot of people 'Are you Turkish,' and trying to meet people from Turkey. Well, Ishmael said, 'No, I'm from Palestine, and how did you get this job here at the computer lab?' I said, 'yeah, it's awesome, isn't it? I can just study and I don't have to do much. Here, you need to talk to our supervisor.' So I actually helped him get a job there. We're still really good friends to this day. We don't talk as much as we used to, but I felt a really good connection with him because he's similar to me. He grew up in America, but his parents are from Palestine, and so we had a lot in common" (excerpted from lines 275-436).

I asked her then if this exploration of this Turkish identity led to anyone discriminating against her at this point.

I feel like I don't really fit the description of the typical, you know, caricature of any ethnic minority, so I feel like people at first glance couldn't just say 'well, there's a Turkish person' or 'there's a Muslim American,' you know? They would have to really get to know me to find out that information, so I'd say I haven't been, at least to my knowledge, discriminated against in any way like that.

I think that in high school, however, I did start perceiving myself differently. You know, the way I thought about myself, rather than "just American." I really started to understand that I could be Turkish American and that I have two cultures. I think one memory really stands out as an identity moment for me. I went to one of my friend's churches. It wasn't my best friend's church, but another one. There was this sermon and I remember the preacher was talking about 'and the Jews and the Muslims are trying to reach the top, but they're not going to make it to heaven,' and all this stuff, and I was like, 'What?' It made me think of my 99-year-old Grandma in Turkey who does her prayers, you know, very religious, very good hearted person, and I realized in that moment, 'well, you know, that's just not my belief, that you have to be one certain way or God is not going to accept you.' So I really thought to myself this too, like, well, I don't know how to describe it, but I felt, like, "well I don't fit into that category, because I can't deny my whole Turkish family because they're not Christian or because they're Muslim' or something like that. And



this I stopped and thought, ‘well now I really need to think about what I do believe.’ (lines 442-446; 450-471).

It was so strange to hear her say this, as it was almost like we’d listened to the same sermon in high school, though that’s not possible, as we were living in completely different areas of the country. I remember being at a big youth rally somewhere in Southern Illinois when I was 16. The whole purpose of the event was to make us “on fire for God,” and to really give ourselves wholeheartedly to a life of service to others. The only problem was that when it came to having us focus on what we should become and what we should do, the speaker for that day kept talking about what we weren’t and activities we shouldn’t participate in. No smoking, no drinking, and we absolutely had to believe in Jesus or we’d be like the Jews and others who weren’t going to make it into Heaven.

I spent a lot of time that night talking with some of our youth leaders about how much this insider/outsider approach bothered me. I had good friends that I’d grown up with in Canada who were Muslims and Hindus, were amazingly kind and loving and devoted to living lives of service and character, and why couldn’t God accept that? Some of the leaders said “no,” but some said “yes.” The ones who said “no,” didn’t linger in the conversation, but I did keep talking to the ones who said, “yes,” curious in about how they saw the nature of God and his love for us. I have to wonder if this scenario doesn’t play out in the lives, faith, and formation of most teens across the country, just knowing how popular this concept of heaven’s gatekeepers can be in religious conversations. For me, it eventually lead to leaving that particular youth

group and climate, but I found another Christian community of believers devoted to service and interfaith dialogue.

I asked her where this searching lead for her.

That really opened my eyes and I felt more interested to learn about Islam, you know? Because I knew my grandmother and my family practiced the religion, but I didn't know very much about it. I became more interested in learning about it to see, you know just what IS the difference between Christianity and Islam? Why do Christians believe Muslims can't 'make it to the top'? That's what really started it for me. That was a memory that I don't forget (lines 473-481).

When I asked her how she went about exploring Islam more, it was an answer very different from what I'd heard Amira and Rose talk about. Their families sent them to scholars and the scholars told stories of their faith or would give outstanding lectures about portions of scripture. For Ashley, the exploration of faith began closer to home and with another explorer and faith seeker: her mother. As I'd learned several times over again, the narratives of parents and their own immigrant and faith journeys play a huge role in how each person I've talked to begins to understand their own stories (Dorner, 2008, 20011) and faiths. It's this intertwining complexity of "in medias res," or the middle of a story; as we think about the beginnings and ends of our own narratives still being in the middle of stories. It is about our parent's stories, our children's stories, our genealogical histories, our country's story, and, really, the stories of Islam and Christianity. We fit in there somewhere as people who were formed by

what comes before us and shape what comes after us, and some of us even understand this context.

Ashley was very aware in the telling of her life and faith the importance of history and family. She began her own story of searching by telling me,

My mom even, she didn't really practice Islam until she was around 40, so you know, we went to church and we kind of used to joke with my mom because she was on this spiritual journey trying to find out who she was and she would read all these, like, new age books about crystals and thought that the crystals had positive energy. I even remember when we went to California and my mom went to this psychic. I thought that was ridiculous. I was in fifth grade, and I was like, 'mom! There's no such thing as a psychic! Why are we going to this?' She's like, 'Ashley, just let me—let me do this.' And so finally I think she started realizing, connecting back to her roots, the way she grew up, and I think like the whole experience, coming to America and then also in Turkey, a lot of people are not raised religiously, but as they get older, they become more active.

I mean, my mom's mom was always active, but my mom's dad was a military man, and they don't mix the two. Their religion, you know. So he was more secular, and more—he was the one who gave her permission to come to the United States. My grandmother didn't want her to come. She begged her not to come. She called my uncles and my great uncles, telling them to tell her they would disown her, you know. It was a big, huge deal (lines 484-508).

Here, with this background knowledge in place, she tells me,

I think in high school and college, I began to read more or just try to read more about Islam. You know, you really have to learn your religion, so it takes time. I'm still learning. I think I started learning about it in high school and college though. (lines 515-517).

The history of her mother's exploration of other religions and beliefs outside of Islam and then deciding to religiously practice Islam around 40 years of age, intertwined with Ashley's story of the minister preaching about Muslims not 'reaching the top,' at this point. The combination of her high school experiences and her mother's own return to Islamic practices and faith made Ashley take action by reading about Islam and exploring the faith more for herself. Another pivotal event may have helped expand her curiosity about Islam as well.

Recently, I was listening to some lecture about memory, like how to trust your memories and a professor was saying that a lot of memories are faulty. He was saying that a study was conducted which asked people where they were on September 11, 2001. It was done right after it happened, and still they found that people kind of answered different or their memories were not as clear. I thought when I hear that, I was like 'no way! I know **EXACTLY** where I was!' I was on campus, at school and I was in class. They made an announcement or somehow the teachers got the news and they told us that classes were cancelled. There were TVs on the campus and so everybody was watching the TVs, looking at the building, you know, smoking buildings and I had no idea. I was like, 'what in the world is going on? And then one of my first thoughts after that was 'I'm glad that my dad is not seeing this. He had passed away [only a

few months or weeks prior] and I thought, ‘Gosh, what’s happening?’ Like, what’s going to happen? Are we going to war? You know, it felt like it didn’t seem it was going to end there. I was shocked and wondering what was next. I was scared, I guess. Worried. Not really for me. I mean, I remember feeling worried about Muslim Americans, like ‘oh gosh, now **everybody**’s going to be [scrutinized], this is the stereotypical Muslim thing now” (lines 557-587).

This isn’t to say that she wasn’t impacted by it or the discourse that followed.

It was **definitely** an act of war. But, I mean, you couldn’t call it a religious war. It’s definitely not about Muslims against Christians, but that’s what people, I think, kind of draw upon. It’s more political than that. Wars have always been political. To try and tie it to religion it’s always like trying to get people against each other somehow. I had a friend, Tim, he used to joke a lot with me and Ishmael because he knew we were Muslim. He was like, “Ya’ll need to go find your damn brother, Osama bin Laden,” and I mean we would joke about it, but we’d remind him, ‘Look, Tim. We’re Muslim. Do you think that we’re out terrorizing people?’ I know it was in the media and on the radio because I remember hearing words like “jihad” and “Martyr,” especially on the news reports, but I don’t specifically remember hearing about “Islamic terrorists.” I remember that people knew these terrorists were from Muslim countries, so they would automatically assume. And these people were claiming to be Muslim and doing whatever it is that the news said they were doing, and I just remember thinking, ‘well, if they’re supposed to be good Muslims, this is not what Islam is about. Islam is about peace. It’s about submitting yourselves to

God. What a **false** representation of your religion! How can they call themselves a Muslim and do things like that? (excerpted from lines 593-670).

This reminded me of the discourse in 2001 from *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch* in “Getting to know you” (2001) as the author separated the practices of most of Islam from “the counterfeit version practiced by terrorists” (para. 3). Similarly, “A different kind of War (2001) stated “war against Islamic terrorists is not a war against Islam. Bin Laden's religious justification for terrorism is far outside the mainstream of Muslim theology” (para. 5). Immediately following 9/11, it seemed that most Americans did not understand this distinction and it bore repeating. Making this distinction became a constant part of the discussion for Ashley herself.

We talked for a bit about navigating the discourse following 9/11 and Ashley told me that although she heard it being framed as a religious issue, “it never was. It was about politics and there’s always a scapegoat. They needed a scapegoat” (line 702). In that moment, I felt like wiser words had never been said. She was able to separate herself and those with which she identified from the larger discourse and simply see it as an encounter where politics, and not really religion, played the biggest part.

After college, Ashley decided to stay in the metropolis area and complete a Masters degree in Applied Linguistics. She continued to meet a more diverse group of people and really learn more about her Turkish roots.

I really had a larger group of Turkish friends because I started working at this Moroccan restaurant and we wore the whole traditional outfit. We had these big pants and little jackets or whatever it was. The people sat on the floor with

pillows and we served very traditional Moroccan food. So there were some Turkish people working there and throughout the course of the dinner, you know, belly dancers came out. They would play **Turkish** music and **Arabic** music and everybody joined in and danced and that was really fun. After the restaurant closed on Fridays and Saturdays, the group of Turkish friends would go to another place—a Greek restaurant that was also a sort of club? They would go there, and I'd go with them, and it was really fun because you would hear Turkish music and everybody was dancing. There were a lot of international people at this particular place, and it was more fun than other places my friends and I used to go because it wasn't booty dancing, you know what I mean? (lines 524-545).

Although she talked about having fun here, it seemed like this was not as pivotal as what came next. After she graduated from the master's program, she moved to Turkey for awhile, to teach English.

It's funny because when I moved to Turkey, I thought, you know, I spent some vacations here and its all, like 'la di da fun fun fun.' But when you actually **go** and live in a big, huge city, it's not really a vacation anymore. It's like, you know, your regular day-to-day life and I know that I felt like when I lived in Turkey, I finally realized that I was definitely part of two cultures. I couldn't just pick one or the others. I had to like both, like I used to say when I was little. I was homesick though. I missed my mom, I missed my brother, I missed the **convenience** of America, as far as daily life. In Turkey, if you don't have a car, you have to get on a bus, go to the market, pick out your groceries, bargain

with the people, and carry all your stuff back home. I mean, I thought, “This is so hard! How do people do it?” I remember really missing the **convenience** of back home in the U.S. where I could just zip in my car and go boom, boom, boom, wherever I wanted (lines 706-726).

The other challenge she faced, she told me, was just being accepted as Turkish.

I knew people in Turkey who didn’t consider me Turkish. My **family** does, but just like friends or other Turkish people that I worked with, they would, I don’t know. I felt like they thought I was more American than Turkish, at least from the way that our interactions. There were groups of Turkish teachers and they were fun, but they never, I felt like they didn’t try and reach out to be friends with me. I don’t know how to explain it.

It was easier for me to be friends with the American teachers. Most of my Turkish friends were actually my cousins and I used to spend a lot of time with them. But they were family, and they know who I am, and I know me, so I felt like I guess because American teachers and American people got my humor, it was just easier to be myself with them. Because Turkish is my second language, it’s not as easy to express myself the same way I do in English (lines 726-745).

Again, we returned to her mother and her mother’s experience with language.

I think that’s how my mom always felt. That it was easier to communicate for her in Turkish, and to be herself in Turkish than in English. But now she says she’s switched. Like now, she feels more comfortable in the U.S. and it’s easier for her. She’s gone through that switch where it’s weird and different now in



Turkey. I used to joke with her because she'd get on the bus with me in Turkey and she'd start like, 'what are we supposed to do?' and ask a lot of questions. I'm like, 'Mom! You're acting like a foreigner in your own country! Just calm down and I'll help you.' She's like, lost, in her own city where she grew up but it's totally changed since she's been there though. (lines 747-762).

Having known Ashley for three years, working together on projects, studying and teaching near each other, it was easy to see why Kai, her mother and her brother are such an integral part of telling her story. While she may have known Kai for less time than her mother or brother, he's was big part of her life here in the Midwest.

I'm not making a strong commitment to attach to St. Louis right now. My home is still in Georgia, and it always will be. I feel comfortable here and I really enjoy living here. There'll always be a special place in my heart for St. Louis, but I had never in my life even planned to visit here! Not, you know, like 'maybe California, maybe Los Angeles,' but I'd never planned to come here until my fiancé at the time moved here and I decided to come visit." (lines 1075-1093).

Her transition into young married life occurred about the same time as she started her PhD program, and so they were very intertwined in our discussions about life and study. When I asked her to bring something with her to tell me about her life story through an artifact, one of the things she brought was her wedding album, filled with pictures of Kai and herself smiling, as well as their family members. "Can you believe it's been two years? The time is just flying by!" She said as she smiled down at the pictures. Ashley made sure to point out and name each family member for me.

Kai was the reason she came here to study, and his work and studies dictated where they would move next.

Even so, her mother and brother played key roles in our discussions and interactions as well. When I asked her who were important people in helping her understand herself and shape her identity, she quickly answered that she's always been driven to be more self-aware, but was her family all along. For as long as I had known her, she had gone home to Georgia at least once a year, whether had been to visit her grandmother visiting from Turkey for awhile, or for her brother's surgery, or just to spend time with her mother. Their stories, past, present and future, were very intertwined and family was very important to her. This was evidenced by the fact that she kept pulling out pictures as artifacts, nine, ten, eleven objects and pictures where other participants brought three items to share at most (See figures III-1, III-2, and III-3 for several images of her artifacts). Pictures of her and her brother as babies, pictures of her and Kai visiting family in Turkey the previous year, pictures of her grandmother going on Hajj (which will be addressed more in depth in the discussion), and pictures of family weddings and the family farm in Turkey. Family and bicultural identity was in everything aspect of her life.

## **Conclusions**

As Sarroub (2002) indicated, living as an "in-between" is a reality for many adolescents as they negotiate their identities, adapting to their social, cultural and physical surroundings (Sarroub, 2002, p. 131). In Ashley's case, this in-between and bicultural identity appeared most clearly in her narrative during adolescence and had extended into emerging adulthood as she navigated multiple and conflicting identities.

This fit with Arnett's (2000) model and time frame, as she indicated seeking out others of Turkish heritage as she began college at age 18, and then in her life experiences in Istanbul, moving there in her mid-20s and primarily connecting with American colleagues and Turkish family members. Most of the identity development, in-between identity creation and negotiation in her story happened between the ages of 18 and 25. However, as Sarroub (2002) articulated, the text and language matter greatly, and this negotiation process occurred in some places before and after these ages, as she came into contact with language and texts that challenged her to adapt. Her familial ties in both Georgia and Turkey attested to this, as she spoke Turkish mostly with family members and was most comfortable with English and American culture among friends. Particularly in her story about attending church in high school and hearing a sermon about Muslims "not making it to the top," she illustrated the importance of texts colliding and conflicting with familial ties and expectations. She rejected this text and this language, stating that in that moment she had to really start thinking about what she really did believe, religion-wise, and ways in which her identities had become more complex and contrastive.

Familial ties were also important in her narrated identity. For Ashley, family and faith were her roots, her strength, and her identity. Although she did not identify as Arab, and spent most of her life in the Southern U.S., she still shared similar stories and life threads with other participants. Her current life and connection to St. Louis, her strong connection to her mother and brother, her challenging adolescent transitions and growing comfort with her religious identity during emerging adulthood connected her to the other narratives presented in the following chapters.

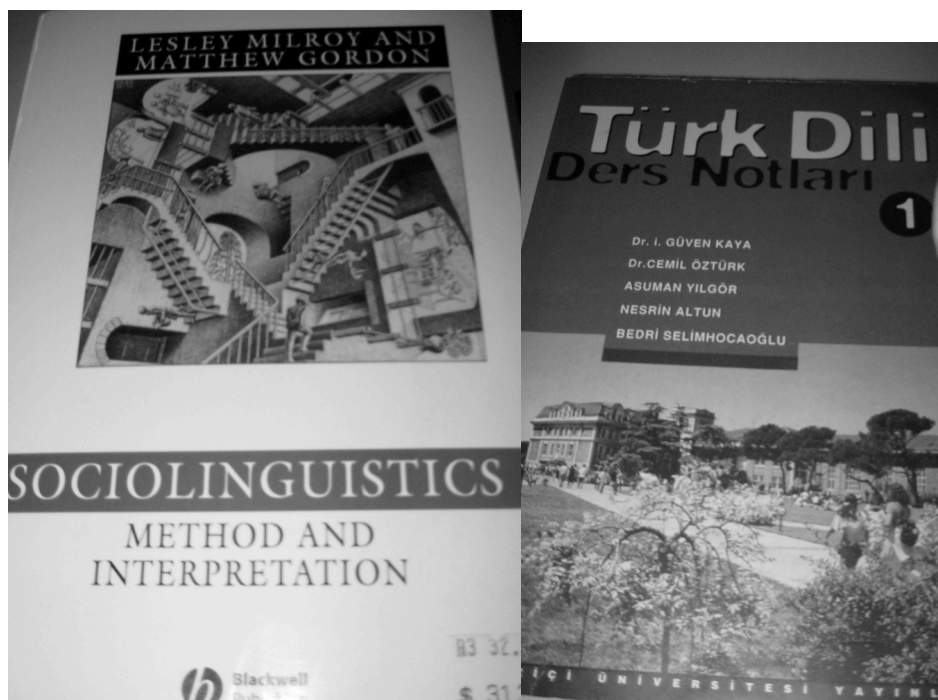


Figure III-1: Ashley's first artifact: Books for study



Figure III-2: Ashley's second artifact: Book for relaxation



**Figure III-3: Ashley's third artifact: Family farm outside Boyabatt, Turkey**

#### **IV Hannah**

Hannah reminded me of the ESL students I had met when I first moved to St. Louis. Unlike the other core participants, she was not an immigrant or child of immigrants, and identified immediately as “Middle Eastern.” She arrived in the U.S at the age of twelve as a refugee. Refugee, and not immigrant, she tried to help me understand several times. Most of the kernel stories she shared with me occurred between the ages of 12 and 18, making emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000) a less important aspect of her story than for the others, but identity development in late adolescence was an important theme in her story nonetheless. Like Ashley, Amira, and Rose, she found adolescence difficult and it wasn’t until her last two years of high school that she really started to become comfortable with her identity. Similar to Amira and Rose, it was during this period of growing comfort with her in-between identities (Sarroub, 2002) that she chose to put on hijab, and did so without pressure from family members.

The time frame between ages 18 and 23 was one we covered very little. She spoke a little about getting her associate’s degree, but in an off-handed manner as it came up when discussing meeting her husband. This may also account for the missing “emerging adult” narrative, as she seemed to take on much responsibility at an earlier age than many in the U.S. Much like Amira, she was not a student at the time of 9/11 and, at the age of 22 or 23, was working as a preschool aide, married for over a year, and acclimated to life away from her mother and siblings. Though her husband and her husband’s family were the only relatives she had in the area, she had rather deep roots here and kept very busy as a student and as a mother of two small boys. The only core

participant with children, she was 33 at the time of our interviews, and was admittedly the most difficult to maintain contact with as her schedule was often very full.

Her story was the clearest example of McAdams' (2006) generative individual I have found. As she talks about different stages of self-development, she constantly refers back to the struggles her father faced and even some that her siblings faced. Reflective, she talks about "living the good life" in Iraq, being popular and an A student. They arrived in the U.S. with very little money in their pockets, but doing "okay" and had several people who really cared about them. Her response to these perceived blessings in the midst of watching her father struggle was a strong desire to be outspoken in her community about life, faith, and culture. In fact, generativity seemed to be the strongest driving force for her, as she sought to correct misunderstandings about her faith and mis-ascriptions about her identities. Perhaps that's why she was so willing to share with me what little free time she did have one Saturday that September.

**"I have to be proud of who I am": Hannah's story**

One of my committee members told me about an advisee she had that she thought fit my study, and she told her to contact me. We talked for a bit about my study, and realized that her friend was a better fit and she would, instead, ask her friend to contact me. When I did hear from Hannah, I was very surprised to find that she was very willing to talk with me as we lived in the same neighborhood and arranging a meeting time and place was rather easy, at least for a first interview. She told me that she fit the description of the participants I was looking for, but other than her name and where we would meet, I didn't ask much about her during that first conversation.

This is probably why I was so surprised at what she had to tell me of her life. She arrived about five minutes late in a red mini van with local college parking tags hanging in her window. She was talking to someone on her cell phone, but within seconds of stepping out of her car, she hung up and smiled brightly at me. She was carrying a small shopping bag from a cosmetic surgery company with her artifacts and seemed a bit unsure of whether I was her interviewer or not. All of these elements struck me as so very typical “Midwestern Mom.” On the other hand, she struck me as naturally beautiful and that’s what made the bag seem so amiss. She wore a cream colored scarf with gold, green and purple threads running through and purple and green headbands to cover the edge of her hairline. She wore a sea green button up tunic shirt and khaki pants, which was an outfit not all that out of the ordinary, but the headscarf did make her stand out a little. It wasn’t all that unusual though, as noticed a number of women in headscarves and Saris in the area that day. I thought immediately that it was probably her, but of course we hadn’t thought to exchange information on how we looked or how we’d locate each other. I took a chance and called out her name,

“Hannah?”

“Emily?” She responded.

I nodded. I was surprised as she stuck out her hand to shake mine. In working with international students, I’d found that this wasn’t culturally acceptable in many places. Again, this was very normal but a bit unexpected. Then again, I realized, she had been living in the US for at least 10 years. I invited her to get a coffee drink and get settled before beginning the interview. She told me that she was fine at the moment and seemed to be ready, if a bit anxious. I asked her about her artifacts, and she seemed



excited to share them (see figures IV-1 and IV-2). “I brought something that is very valuable to me and is very old,” she explained. She pulled out a beautiful woven prayer rug, that she “got when I told my mom when I was little I wanted to start praying, she got me this. I was about seven years old. So I kept it.” Initially, I thought that this was a memento of her faith journey. I had no idea how precious this item really was until we talked about the second item, which was a plate from Egypt. When I asked, “oh is your family from Egypt?” her response was a firm “No” followed by a short statement “I’m Iraq,” before she moved on explaining the history of the plate.

I had no idea and was afraid that I might have offended her this early in our discussion. The plate was something she’d found in Jordan while shopping with her would-be husband in an antique store. Again, it was an interesting thread that was picked up again later but she was most eager to share her third item—a picture of her two boys, who were three years old and one year old in the picture, but were at the time of the interview now seven and four. Of course I thought they were adorable. They had the huge cheesy smiles of small boys eager to please mama. It was a look I was familiar with, as my son was two at the time and full of cheesy smiles as well. It was so nice to connect with another mom over pride in her sons.

Sadly, I thought I already had her pegged—a little, at least. I said to her

So, in introducing yourself to me, you mentioned the beginning of your prayers, meeting your husband or the year you met your husband, and you mentioned your kids. Do you feel like those are the three large events in your life?

She answered affirmatively and said “yeah, my husband and my kids are the most major things but starting to pray? I kept it because it’s the only thing left for me

to remember my childhood because when the gulf war started back in 91, we left with just the clothes on our back.” When I double check with her about when they arrived and I use the word “immigrate,” she’s quick to correct. “We were refugees. It’s different.” Status? I ask.

Yes that too, but when you immigrate, you get to keep your national citizenship. You get to keep your passport. If you’re a refugee, you don’t. You say ‘okay, I don’t wanna be an Iraqi anymore. I want to be American.’ They drop the Iraqi citizenship and get the American. That’s how it works with refugees (lines 305-318).

This was where Hannah’s story really began in some ways, at least in my mind and in her telling, as she arrived as a refugee in the US around the age of 11 or 12. However, we also talk a little about earlier life. These were mentioned only in passing and she told me,

What I remember from my country is like a dream to me. It’s like this faded dream. It doesn’t look real to me. But here I remember my friends, spent my teenage years here, so I’m more used to American life. Like I just can’t go back there and live. I can’t (lines 730-734).

In their community in Iraq, cousins surrounded them. Families lived close to each other, and most of her early playmates were cousins or other relatives.

I had two best friends that I wish I could meet now. We were close, up to fifth grade, and they were not my cousins. Mostly my friends were my cousins because here’s our house, here’s my uncle’s house, my aunt’s house. You know, we family like to uh live close to each other” (lines 365-368).

She was a good student and well liked in the early years.

When you're an A student back home, you get to be a president of your class, so I was kinda popular back then because I was president. I was president in second grade, third grade, and fourth grade. Others said things like "oh she's going to be a doctor or whatever, you know?" But that's the only thing I active in, you know, school. With my dad we couldn't even watch TV. We have to study. (lines 374-381).

She was the youngest of seven children, and had four older brothers and two older sisters. "There was a lot of pressure on us!" she admitted to me. When I asked her if there were any important events or influential people for her in these early years, she stated, "I don't recall much of it."

This is why I say that her story, at least the story of personal formation and transformation began in her adolescence. However, she firmly anchored her story to that of her larger family and especially her dad's story. As she began to talk about Iraq, she stepped back for a moment and said, "Oh let me tell you my dad's story" (line 101-102). In many ways, it was a story of interdependence and one that had a redemptive quality focusing on generativity, as McAdams (2006) work indicates many American life stories do.

Her telling of this story began with the wealth and power of her father in Iraq. He was a top official who chose to rise against those in power in 1990-1991, and with the belief that leaving was only a temporary set back at first.

We thought we were going to go back. Like, [we left] until things settled? And it didn't work that way. We ended up here and our house went to the

government. We're outcasts now. They destroyed the house, with everything in it. Like our home videos, pictures, you know, childhood stuff, my toys, everything. It was bombed to the ground. I kept this [rug], like okay, this is the only thing. I don't know why, like when we left? We said, "well, we're coming back," so I grabbed this. At the time I was excited about, you know, wanted to feel like an adult, so...this is like a big step, you know....so that's one of the things that made say "okay, I'm a responsible person" (excerpted from lines 74-95).

When my uncle sent a message to my dad, he said "Never come back. My dad, he was a known lawyer back home and was in the senate. So to do something, to rise against the government or against the President? You're executed. They sentenced him to death, him and his family along with him, like we are all sentenced to death if we ever go back. Back in the '80s, he went to London, he loved it there and he wanted to move there, but couldn't because of his position. He couldn't leave Iraq—they told him he could go visit and stuff, but could take his family. He tried several times to leave the country, but he couldn't. We didn't think that we were going to live here [in the US], but now it's been almost 20 years (excerpted from lines 100-119).

As she told me this, I sat enthralled, and yet completely in shock. After the most recent altercations in Iraq recounted on the news each night, I was used to hearing about people fleeing the country. I never thought of it happening in the midst of the early 1990s. I remembered watching portions of "Operation: Desert Storm" coverage

on the television in our basement, but never could have imagined living in that kind of upheaval at my age.

As I reflected on her telling, however, it struck me as a bit strange, this central focus on her father. She talked about her involvement in a very distanced manner. She talked about her family as a whole as in “we,” but most of struggle, the hurt, is told almost solely from her father’s perspective. It could have been her age at the time and the possibility that perhaps she didn’t know all of this information until after the fact, or perhaps it has more to do with the lens through which she viewed these events, but the focus seems to either be on “we,” the family, or “my father.” McAdams (2006) states that generative adults have two distinctive qualities: 1) that they see their own experiences as blessed or very positive in some way and yet 2) that they recognize that there are others suffering around them. In this way, I began to make sense of the ways in which Hannah frames this story. She saw her early experiences as very privileged and blessed, and yet she also saw the struggles her mother and especially her father have as they were forced to seek refugee status and give up the life they were used to living.

Back home, we had the life at the time. We had the big house, the money, everything. We came here with just \$100 in our pocket. Everything, even my dad’s money was, like, frozen at the bank over there” (lines 123-125). It was a tough start. After staying just a few months in London because they weren’t granted permanent stay, and arrived in Texas. I would say like the first ten years we were not happy, especially like my dad. He was almost fifty when we came here, and he had to start all over, studying law. He couldn’t work like in a

gas station as a store attendant, so he was like ‘I’m not living here. I’m not raising my kids here’—he wasn’t used to this life. He was used to having his own people, his own office and his luxurious car and stuff. He didn’t have that so he was very depressed. He went back to the Middle East. Well, at first he stayed with his friend in London for a couple of years and then he went to live in Syria because he couldn’t live here. But it was—every time he comes here, it’s like chaos (lines 688-689).

Here she shifted away from her father as the central figure in the story to herself, jumping briefly from eighth grade through high school and beyond.

My mother didn’t have a problem with [living in the U.S.] she was okay with it, but my dad was like—but my brothers, like, each one went about their separate lives. They got their masters here...so it worked for them. But for my dad it didn’t work. It was so hard on him” (excerpted from lines 714-726).

While she went into greater detail on the earliest years in the US, it was interesting to notice how little time was spent describing her first year in the US. “Our first stop was in Houston, Texas. We lived there for a year, and that’s when I started eighth grade” (lines 135-136). That was all she stated at first about Texas. It was only later when I asked her about transitions that she told me about classroom tension.

They didn’t know anything about Muslims, except what they heard about the war so I was asked a lot of questions. Did I ride on a camel to school? I’ve never seen a camel in my life! Why do I wrap this around my hair and some other weird questions? It was hard to explain to them at the time, and at the time, my English was not as perfect so I had a hard time adjusting that first year.

I had a hard time getting them to understand me, that I was like a regular person, you know? I was a regular teenager, and for a teenager that really lowers your self-esteem. I thought 'I'm different and I'm noticeable and something is wrong.' I came home crying and begging not to go to school anymore... As a Muslim at that time in the early nineties? You were not that popular (excerpted from lines 521-539).

While her classmates seemed to be shocked by her appearance and life experiences, she was also in a state of culture shock after arrival.

First when we went to Paris before we came here, like when we did the transit so we stayed three days in Paris, and I saw all the beautiful people, skinny and stuff, I was like "okay, that's what I see on TV." I came here and I was shocked because I looked at people and I looked around and it was like "where are the pretty people [like they show on TV]? All I see are obese people. When I saw American movies, they were all skinny and pretty. Coming to Texas? It was a shock to me (excerpted from lines 472-491).

It wasn't all about difficulties during this time, however. When we talked about people who influenced her and helped her find her identity, we also talked about her first English teacher and more of her experiences in Texas.

The teacher was so nice and she was always telling me that you have to be proud of who you are. I still remember I used to stay in her class, like, after school. She guided me through that year. She was there for me every time I cried and was not feeling well. And she was there for me" (lines 648-660).

She spent more time describing this teacher and the comfort and friendship she provided than anything else about the year in Texas. She gave a lengthy explanation of why they moved to Michigan and why she loved being there. The simple answer was interpersonal connectivity; That is to say that they were enticed to go there because of friendships and community already established in the area. They loved being there because of the large Arab community already present and a sense of belonging there.

Hannah states,

We moved to Michigan because a friend of ours told us “come over here,” and for me? I loved it. You know? Because there are a lot of Arabs there, and Middle Easterners. And uh it was, for me, like these are my people” (excerpted from lines 137-146).

Michigan and high school weren’t without more culture shock, however.

Then the culture shock I faced was when I went to high school and saw pregnant women, pregnant teenagers. I thought to myself, you know, “we don’t have that back home.” Like you mostly graduate, then you get married, then you have kids. Even if you’re having sex, which, back home you can’t say like “I’m doing it,” but people are doing it secretly. But you don’t see a pregnant girl in school! You don’t see that and I thought like “oh my god.” I was like “Where am I? Am I in a school or what? “ Like all pregnant with kids? That was totally shock to me.” (excerpted from lines 491-505).

Overall, the experience in Michigan was more comfortable for her, though.

When I went to Michigan and saw all the people there, all the Muslim people and people who were born here, they understood me for who I am. In tenth



grade [two years after moving to Michigan], that's when I realized to myself, "okay, I'm a Muslim, and I'm a Middle Easterner, and that's how I was born, so I have to live with it., and I have to be proud of it. I cannot just keep hiding myself from it. Keep, like, not talking about it. In Texas, when they asked me at first, I was like 'yeah I'm a Muslim and stuff.' And they'd ask all kinds of questions 'So why do you face the sun?' or something. That was weird to me, so I stopped telling them that I was a Muslim. When I became proud of myself and who I was, then that's when I decided, "Okay, I'm going to go ahead and wear [hijab]" And that's my identity that I have to be proud of. I have to be proud of who I am. Actually, I made something. We found this saying, me and my friends, and we made it as a banner. It says, "I didn't ask to be an Arab—I just got lucky. We made shirts, like at the high school I went to (Excerpted from lines 542-570).

In fact, it was during this time that she really began to understand and share her faith with others.

People started asking me questions and I was, like, more open about it. I would tell them, 'well, this is how we do it. This is how I think of it. I started I even translating part of the Qur'an and telling them 'okay, this is what the Qur'an says about the Virgin Mary and Jesus and Moses.' One day, I asked my older brother 'what is it to be a Muslim?' because at the time I did not understand that, and he said, 'well, you know, Islam is a continuous religion of Christianity. You can't be a Muslim unless, you know, you are a believer in Jesus and a believer in Moses.' So I was like 'okay, then what's the trouble then? What's

the fuss about?’ So that’s when I started, like, telling people ‘Hey, no! wait!

Islam is not a single religion; it’s like a continuation of all these religions.

That’s what it’s supposed to be. It’s not like Mohammed just woke up and said ‘okay, let me create a religion.’

It’s something, like, the continuing message of Jesus, and so, yeah, that’s when I started like telling people” (excerpted from lines 590-611).

She lived in Michigan until 2000, when she met her husband and things began to change. Her mother, however, still lived in Michigan and so Michigan seemed to have a strong sense of “home” for her. On the other hand, when we talked about Iraq, she always referred to it as “back home.”

As we talked about 2000 being a time of change for her, I asked her how she met her husband.

We actually met in late ’99. November of ’99. We got engaged in February of 2000, and then we got married in July of 2000. So was like that couple of months. Well, my husband? His older brother is my sister’s husband. He’s my brother in law, but the older brother and my sister got married when I was young. I didn’t know him very well then. So my mom’s mom? She went to Syria, and my mom went to visit her. I went with her to see my grandma ‘cause I hadn’t seen her for, like, 9 years. I go to see her with my mother, and, **he** (my now husband) was there to see his mom. Well, it was like we’re in-laws, but we, like, never looked at each other as that way, you know. Like they’re just married. So while there, over there, we had fun you know because we both, like, see he took me places, like “let me show you here” because he was there

for a longer time so, it's like, okay. He took me to that part and that part and we got to know each other and we ended up getting married. (excerpted from lines 151-173).

He lived in St. Louis at the time, and so did his whole family.

My husband was in twelfth grade when the [uprising in Iraq] happened, so when his older brother, the one that married to my sister, left and his other brother, they rose against the government so they had to leave. He left with them at first [though he hadn't been part of the uprising], but he was at the end of the year of his high school, so he didn't want to lose that. He went back to finish it because he wanted to go to medical school. He ended up in Veterinary medicine. He finished Veterinary medicine and then after he finished it, uh he got his degree in Veterinary medicine, he left the country and came over here, and uh he decided he didn't want to be a Veterinarian anymore.

He got his masters in Biochemistry from UMSL and because he wanted to switch either to umm human medicine or something, they told him all he had to do was take the MCAT, and finish like, I think, three more years after what he studied. But he had to do it as full time schooling, and he couldn't do that because he had to support his family back home too. He has his brother back home and his mother and his sister and he was like 'I can't do it.' So he ended up just, like, getting his masters in biochemistry. He currently works as a biochemist." Being close to family and pursuing better education to care for family seems to be a thread that ran throughout both of their lives. Hannah gave

up that proximity to her family, though, in order to come here and be closer to his family.

In 2000, when I met my husband, he lived here, and his family was here, so I moved here. I was like ‘let me try it here,’ but I’ve never liked it (excerpted from lines 135-149; 754-782).

As we dove further into our discussion, she compared her Midwestern experiences to both Michigan and Texas unfavorably, saying that it was very dusty and she felt as though she could never keep her house free of dust (lines 195-197). She also found her neighbors far more withdrawn and unwilling to even say hello or recognize her (excerpted from lines 202-221). She gave me a recent example.

Like last month, my neighbor’s son, he’s like couple years younger than me, but he lives with his mother. I saw him in the college [where I attend] and I was like “hey, how are you? What—what are you doing here?” ‘Cause, you know, I say hi to him all the time, but we never really talk, but I talk to his mother.

And he was like, “I’m sorry, are you mistaking me for somebody?” I said, “I’m your neighbor?” “And then he says, “ah ha! Oh, okay.” And it was like that is sad. To say hi to your neighbor, and not know them in public? So that part I do not like. In Michigan, even in Texas when I lived there in Houston, you see like neighbors like sitting outside talking to each other (lines 208-221).

She told me that this disconnect with the community and discomfort with the weather made her depressed for several years. I could only imagine that this was exacerbated by the events of 9/11 and following. She began her telling of that day by saying,

I used to work in uh in a preschool as a teacher assistant. We were like in classroom with the kids, reading a story for them and, you know, playing with them, when my friend was like the teacher of that class came in crying. She said ‘I have to go get my kids. I have to go with my kids.’ I was like ‘what happened?’ And she said ‘America’s under attack.’

And I freaked out. I went, like, kept calling my husband and I was like, ‘who did it?’ He said, ‘well, they don’t know. It’s like, you know, somebody attacked New York.’ We didn’t know what was going on. We went and talked to the Principal, telling him ‘we have to leave. We have to go home. We have to see what’s going on. What if it’s under attack really?’ ‘Cause that that fear of ‘America’s under attack ‘ that’s what they **think!** We left, we left for home and I turned on the TV, and I saw ‘suspecting an Arab’ and I was like ‘oh God. Please don’t be like that.’ I said ‘Please don’t be an Arab.’ It brought memories where at the time of Oklahoma bombing, and I was here in the United States too. I actually I lost a friend to that. Yeah, she was in Oklahoma, and she was pregnant and they beat her to death while she was pregnant and I was like ‘Oh my God.’ It was horrible. Oh my God, I kind of was like ‘Oh my God. It might be like that.’

Then my husband came home then and it was like “So if this is stuff happening, do you think it’s um it’s al Qae—’ He said, ‘well yeah, **I** think it’s al Qaeda. Yeah, **they** think it’s al Qaeda and al Qaeda they’re not one of us. They’re—’ I’m like ‘they’re **not us**. They’re evil people.’ I asked him, ‘What do we do? So what does this mean?’ He was like, ‘well, don’t leave the house now.’

Everybody's in this chaos everywhere.' So yeah. I actually I went back to work. I was like 'I'm not leaving work for that,' you know. 'Who cares?' (Excerpted from lines 789-826).

Unfortunately, they did care.

To be honest, where I was working, there were black women, one white woman and me. It was the white woman that were giving me that really dirty look. My black friends were like kind of sympathetic towards me. They were like, 'oh don't worry about it,' you know, 'she's just a trashy whatever.' You know that kind of back and forth between people. I was like, "I'm not worrying about it, but why is she giving me that look? Why me? Did I do it? I don't know. What had really gotten to me was that people did not understand in regards to me, I don't know about other people, but for **me**, we were completely from different countries. We had different beliefs. Both Muslims, but we have different beliefs, and he said it that, well, I'm a Shia Muslim and he is a Shi'ite so he could kill a Shia Muslim or Christian and would go to heaven. And that's his history.

That's his motto.

'So I wanted people to understand that he didn't care if I died. He doesn't care if I live. He'd be, like, 'okay, she deserved it. She's a Shia. She's an infidel. ' To him, I am like that. It killed me like people did not understand it. And when you explain to them, they act like "okay, she's just hiding" (excerpted from lines 831-853). It didn't just happen at work. "At Wal-Mart one time, there was this guy he said 'hey bitch!' I looked around, it's like is he's talking to me?

He's like, 'yeah, you. Why don't you go back to hide with your husband in the cave?' I said 'okay, I will,' and I left. I'm like how can you argue with those people? (Lines 878-882).

There was also that banner from high school that she'd kept and displayed in the back window of her car.

Back to that banner that I had that says 'I didn't ask to be an Arab—I just got lucky. 'I had it in my car, I had an infinity G20 at the time/ and umm my friends were like 'oh that is so cool and stuff.' And all of a sudden, it was a big problem and every day, like I saw like there was a eggs on my car and one time I found like a broken beer glasses on it. So then I had to take it off. It'd been there for **years**. That was my thing and they'd taken it away" (excerpted from lines 906-919).

That wasn't the only thing taken away because of the fears surrounding 9/11.

I had to leave that preschool job, by the way. I finished that year, until May, and then I had to quit, because of the environment. Another thing was because of the mothers of the children. They said they didn't want me to be their kids' teacher,

and one of them threatened me. She said she wanted to beat me, and I was like "Why?" and she said that because I was not nice to her kid. Umm I was the teacher **assistant**, I was not the teacher, so I followed – and that? I was so nice to him because I felt I felt sorry for him because he was telling me these stories that he went to the bar with his mom and his mom fell on the floor because she was a drunk. So I was so nice and I hugged him. He needed his mother's

attention and she was probably talking bad about me at home. I think he started telling her that I grabbed him hard or I pinched him or something [to get her attention]. She came in like 'I'm going to beat her up. I'm going to do something.' I was like 'okay, forget it. I'm not I'm not doing this anymore' (excerpted from lines 919-943).

With this, our conversation turned more to our sons. Mine, who was in preschool at the time, was having trouble sitting still and listening to his teacher. The teacher told me recently that she thought he had ADD or another serious problem. Hannah came to my defense and the defense of her son, who, it turns out, struggles with ADD.

By the time he was five, he was diagnosed with ADD. But, it's no problem. Now I look at my son, and he has a different brain, he's smarter than what we thought and he has this extra energy. He gets bored really easily. And it's hard to get them to focus, but then they focus, they focus. Like they do perfect job. When he's on medicine, I can tell that. He the best in his class/ when 'cause now I put him on like on and off to see the difference?

Especially in **math**. He has this brain for math (excerpted from lines 973-989).

I could practically see her beaming with pride as she talked about her son and his accomplishments.

I couldn't help but wonder how 9/11 had impacted the lives of very young Muslims in its aftermath. She told me it hadn't really impacted him in school at all.

My son was born five years almost—four years after that incident. When he started preschool, he was almost four, so by that time people had kind of not



forgotten about it, but they dealt with it. The Iraqi war took over, other stuff took over so it's kind of not as weird as it was before" (excerpted from lines 991-996).

That, too, made me curious, as she sat here in the United States watching this country enter into war with a place that used to be her home, really twice in the time since she had come here in the early 1990s.

My husband always says that when I see something on TV about Iraq, I say 'I don't feel moved.' You know? I'm not a patriot. I don't have that feeling for my country. I was like 'It's not that I don't have feeling for my country, but all I remember, what I remember from my country is like a dream to me. It's like this faded dream. It doesn't look real to me (excerpted from lines 726-732).

I was surprised by how much more she had to say about her current life and studies as a biochemical engineering student, working on her bachelor's degree. I was also surprised at how comfortable she was in her own skin, and making fun of herself.

Now in school, I joke about, like uh I have a (*quietly*) bomb or I'm a terrorist or something. We joke about that. I'm at the point where, like, making fun of it's okay with **me**. I know that so, to me, it's about loving who I am. Like I said, I was born like that and I I'm I am who I am, so I all I have to do is make the best of it, you know? And that's when I decided to go back and finish umm my bachelor's [after 9/11], and to make something for myself, to be known as this successful engineer, and not that. That's how I think of it now.

'What I tell my friends is we all came in from one person. We all came from Adam and Eve, so why this fuss? And actually I have like a Jewish friend at

school, and I call him cousin because, like, you know why we're cousins?

Yeah, because of Ishmael and Jacob. So and we joke about that. It doesn't really bother me anymore. It's like I can stand up for myself. I can tell you who I am. I can tell you more about my religion, where I came from, and I keep telling people to **please** do not, like when I say I'm an Iraqi? Do not compare me to any other terrorists or Sadaam. And he was against me, so that worked for my benefit. And umm for the longest time, I rose uh American flag when [the terrorists attacked] because it hurt me.

Her words cut right through me, as I thought about the rippling effect of this, both in terms of grief and in terms of xenophobia. Her next words were even more powerful, as they reminded me of her righteous anger.

It hurt me not because he was a Muslim, but it's because of what he did. He technically ruined the idea of Islam. He just like stabbed Islam in the back, because that's not the message of Islam. Islam is like supposed to be a **peaceful religion**. That's the whole idea about it, and now you doing this? Even though it says in the Qur'an you go to hell if you kill people on purpose? You know, if you kill a civilian, if you're in a war, fighting, like soldier to soldier, you can't change that but to go and kill civilians? You're going to go to hell no matter what. God does not approve that. And you go and do that in the **name** of that religion? And God will prepare this meal for you when you go up there and exalt you for what you've done? That's crazy. That's crazy (excerpted from lines 1038-1052).

I asked her how she began to challenge those ideas.

At the school I go to, we have a lot of events and international students stuff, so I talk in front of a lot of people about 9-11, about Islam, and about what the difference is between-- like people here think you're a Muslim, Arab, and Middle Easterner. When you say "I'm a Muslim," then that means you're an Arab. When you say "I'm an Arab," that means you're a Middle Easterner. When you say, "I'm a Middle Easterner," that means you're all those, and I I told them, like, it's not like that. If you are from the Middle East, you can be Christian, and Middle Easterners? **Half** of them are not Arabs. When you're an Arab, you're not a Muslim, like, you know there's there are Arabs who are Muslims, Arabs are Jewish, Arabs are, you know, so **don't** get that idea that just because. Here's another story. I had a friend who's from Iran. He's not a Muslim, but people ask him stuff about Islam, and it **bothers** him because he doesn't believe in it. One time, he said he was at the store and and [some people] called him terrorist, so he put this shirt that says that says "Pure Persian."

*He said, "Well I have to tell people something! They keep mistaking me for a Muslim terrorist!"* (Excerpted from lines 1063-1089).

Despite these efforts, however, Hannah assured me that she still faced many misconceptions, even at the school where she's spoken so often.

One time last year, someone in my math class asked me the most stupidest question she could ask. She came to me, she said 'so what are you? Are you a Muslim or an American?' I said, 'well, I'm both.' And she said, 'How can you be both?' I said, 'okay, my religion is Islam, and I'm an American.' And she

goes, like, 'oh! Isn't it Islam is a country?' I said, "You're kidding, right?"

She said, 'no! I think it--' and then she stopped and said, 'That's why when I look at um the map, I don't see Islam on there, ' but then she looked confused and said, ' I saw a small country that says 'Islam' something.' I said, 'that's Islamabad. That's in Pakistan, that's a city. It has nothing to do with (with the name for it. It doesn't have to do anything with a religion.'

I was like, 'well don't you watch the news?' And she said, 'Well, yeah they said this person is Muslim.' I'm like, "well, yeah. Aren't you a Christian?

Aren't you a Christian and an American? If you can be, why can't I be Muslim and an American?' That's what I told her! She could not connect those two, so

I was like, 'Okay, I'm not arguing with you anymore' (excerpted from lines 1114-1144).

## **Conclusions**

While misunderstandings and mis-ascription of identities were plentiful in Hannah's kernel stories, it is a generative nature (McAdams, 2006) and story that wove throughout her life. It is a desire to give back and not anger that seemed to drive her need to speak out and to become involved in her college and larger local community. Her father's story was recounted in pieces throughout as she reminded me that, for her mother and her brothers, her sisters and her, coming to the U.S. and assimilating "worked out," but for him it didn't "work out." She perceived her life as a good one, despite the fact that coming to the U.S. was a difficult transition at first.

She articulated well a navigation of in-between identities several times, first in her musings that her Iraqi friends believe she's "too American," but that her American

friends say she's "not too American," and then again as she talked about distinguishing between Arab, Middle Eastern and Muslim identities. Much like Rose, as the following chapter demonstrates, Hannah continued to define and refine her identities beyond the traditional time period and boundaries of emerging adulthood, as she thought about her sons and what legacies she might leave from her own life and experiences. As Hannah constantly told me, she was proud of who she was and happy to share that with others: Arab and English speaking, Middle Eastern, Iraqi and American, Muslim and family-oriented and loving.



**Figure IV-1: Hannah's first artifact: First prayer rug**



**Figure IV-2: Hannah's second artifact: Egyptian plate found at a Bazaar in Jordan.**

## **V Rose**

Rose articulated—and lived—her in-between (Sarroub, 2002) and bicultural identities well. Having grown up in the area, moved with her family to another country for a little while, moved back, gone elsewhere for college and then moved back as a young adult, she had both global perspective and “insider” knowledge of the metro area. She had experienced 9/11 at the age of 19 while thousands of miles from her family, away for her second year of college, but talked about being embraced by the community around her. The youngest of the group, still 29 at the date of our second interview, she also seemed the most unsettled and still in the midst of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000).

Family ties played a large role in her story and her development of bicultural and in-between identities, primarily noted in her kernel stories between the ages of 23 and 29. Although she had married young, the erosion of the marriage when she was in her early twenties led to a re-emergence of emerging adulthood for her; Rose moved back home with her family and spent some time figuring out “what to do with [her] life.” During this time she focused less on professional development and more upon identity development and being generative (McAdams, 2006). She volunteered to serve with the Council on American-Islamic Relations, spoke with FBI and police groups about the dangers of profiling and mis-ascribed identities, and worked with her sister on a number of charity events to increase awareness about Islam and decrease misunderstandings.

By 2011, however, she seemed both more confident in her bicultural identities and anxious to move on and move out of the Midwest. This was most evident in her

response to the question of her race and self-positioning. Like the other participants, she was a passionate pursuer of knowledge, having completed a master's degree a few months prior to our first meeting, and was considering even further schooling, primarily for the joy of learning.

**“Through learning about the people around you, you learn about yourself”:**

### **Rose's Story**

I was put in touch with “Rose” through two people who had worked with her in the mid-2000s at the local chapter of the Counsel on American-Islamic Relations. I had just been handed her name and number, told “Call Rose at this number. She has said she is interested,” and was rather unsure of what to expect. She quickly agreed to meet and meet much sooner than I thought would be possible. There was very good reason behind this, as they were in the midst of preparations for her sister's wedding and with family coming and staying with them from out of country on top of wedding plans, they would be very busy the following month.

When she arrived a bit out of breath and smiling at the coffee shop in Barnes and Noble, Rose asked if she could quickly grab a cup of coffee as she was dragging after a long day. Before I could start, she burst into questions about my studies and the PhD program itself, saying that she was interested in the PhD process as she'd just finished her masters and considered possibly going on later. She was also curious as to how old I was. It turned out that she was almost exactly one month younger than me, and the only person in this project who was my age. We also shared very similar childhood experiences at points. She wanted me to turn the recorder on as early as possible so that she could forget it was there and just talk comfortably.



She seemed well prepared to share her story in a very detailed and chronological fashion, which was unusual. One element that actually didn't surprise me much is the artifact brought to share her story—her computer and laptop bag (See figure V-1). Although she was born in the early years of the “millennial generation,” she reflected well the multi-tasking, techno-savvy aspects of her age group. She told me, “my computer carries all my life on it, and so has all my photographs, all my college essays, my graduate school essays, you know, information, private journals, public journals, everything.” (lines 56-59). For her, it seemed, much of her life and thought and narrative was already in the words of everyday and academic writings, and in her digital photographs as well. This was a remarkable difference in some ways from the others in the study. Though Ashley was only one year older and Hannah was three years older, when they shared photos to tell their stories, they were in paper format while everything important to Rose was stored digitally and on her laptop computer.

The ways in which I perceived this generation gap between participants did not end with the way in which she presented her objects, but also transferred into the telling of her life as well. Other participants often would circle back in places constantly as people would remember additional experiences they wanted to share or details that were important to events they'd told earlier. From the very beginning, Rose told me exactly where she was born, which hospital, on what date, where her family lived and how long they lived there before they moved. After these statements of fact, she moved into telling more about her family.

So then, we lived ... there up until I was nine years old umm and I have an older brother and older sister and two younger sisters, so around, I don't know we just

grew up with, like, my dad's a doctor, so he's **always** at work and my mom's, you know, my mom's always been at home, like taking care of us, so we got a lot of family time, I guess. (lines 167-172).

As I had actually lived in a town not too far from where she'd grown up, we'd talked a bit earlier about racism I'd encountered in the area. Somewhat in response to those statements, she said,

Since we were the only Arab family in the area and everybody else had young kids, like we just had nice neighbors, I think. We never really had any problems with the neighbors, and at school everybody knew our family because I guess my parents were different. So yeah, I remember just having really nice memories in the area growing up. (lines 174-181).

Later on, we talked more about her parent's experiences as immigrants and how she felt this impacted the way she was raised. Rose reflected,

I think when my dad came to the US, I don't know if he was thinking like about his kids, and I think a lot of Syrians came to the US with the idea that 'hey we're going to go back to Syria one day.' It's not like they came here saying 'okay, we're here and we're going to stay here for our kids and educate them,' but I think the fact of the matter is that they came here and they spent so much time here, and then they had their kids, but they sacrificed a lot to leave their countries. I think, they probably thought 'okay, we're here, we're going to try to raise a really good generation because it is already a struggle to be away from our families and our homeland and our countries, and how are we going to raise

our kids in a different culture? And try to raise them the way that we want to, and the way that we were raised.

I think people, when they have kids, they try to not replicate themselves, maybe like self replicate, but improve on what they should have, what they could have improved on? I think that with my parents they definitely tried to raise us more traditional, and we had a couple of friends when we were growing up, but my parents never brought in many people. Some families like bring in a ton of people and expose their children to a lot of different people while they're growing up, but the only people that really came over a lot were my mom and my dad's family. People from my dad's work and my mom's just people that she would meet would come over, but it's not like they spent extensive amounts of time with us? My parents had more control over like how they raised us, I guess.

For my parents, they always said 'we are staying in the US after all, and we want you guys to be the best that you can be,' because they wanted to see their children succeed. I don't want to say that they suffered by leaving their countries or anything, but did a lot to leave, like, to leave your country completely and change your whole lifestyle and you know, here my mom and my dad I talk about when they first moved here, it's the stories. Basic, basic small things that we take for granted were really difficult for them. And so, it's sort of maybe I feel like my responsibility to make them respect the fact that they sacrificed a lot for us. You know?

So I've thought of my job as not to fool around and not sort of disappoint them.

‘Cause it’s they’re the ones who suffered so I feel like we have to show them that we respect that. (from lines 1993 -2082).

She turned back to focus on her family again following this reflection, stating that her mom wanted to move the family to the Middle East so that the children could learn Arabic and more information about Islam, (lines 183- 187). Almost as an afterthought, she added,

And mom wanted to be closer to her family...I don’t think I told you that background, right? So my mom and my dad are both from Damascus, Syria. they came in the 70s. My dad, he came in 74, and my mom came around ’77, I think. Yeah. And my mom actually came here because her older sister, who raised her moved here and got married to her husband who came on a ship in like 1945. (lines 188-1195).

Once again, much like the case with Hannah and Amira, not only had nationality become part of her story, but the history of how and why her parents arrived had become part of how she understood and narrated her identity as well. Her parents met in Syria through what Rose initially described as “fake courting” (line 203) where the husband’s family started calling around to other families

and they ask, you know, ‘Are there any available girls who, you know, wanna get married? Marriageable girls?’ So they say ‘Yeah, we know this family, and they this girl and here’s their number.’ So they call up and find out. It’s always by word of mouth (Lines 209-212).

Though her father’s family and mother’s family initially “lived down the street from one another” (lines 214-215), they did not meet then as Rose’s mother wasn’t

interested in him at all, “because she was living her own life,” Rose reflected.

However, when Rose’s mother followed her aunt to the U.S. and the Midwest, Rose’s father asked to come see her. Rose said her mother was “not too excited about it” (line 234) at first, she did come around to thinking it was “going to work” (line 235) and they were married. “That’s the way it worked back then,” (line 236) Rose stated.

They moved to Kansas, and then they moved to [this area]. So I was the third kid and like I said, you know I always had like a cozy upbringing. I just remember being happy when I was a kid, you know? (lines 263-264) .

She then stepped back into her own story, talking more about her school and home experiences.

So my [older] brother and I, I always remember he and I were in school together. We’re two years apart, so I just kind of remember seeing him in the elementary school. It was a public school, and I bring that up because now a lot of people put their kids in, like, private religious schools in the Muslim community especially in, like, [the wealthier areas]. So then we grew up. We **watched** television, we ate junk food (*laughs*) I ate McDonalds. I watched a lot of cartoons. (lines 269-278)

Clearly, she used this to show change in childhood experiences over time; she reflected that parents are now more “conscious of television and what their kids watch” (lines 284-285). She then drew parallels between their watching of cartoons and her parents coming to the U.S., “like everything in a way was new because television or cable or whatever for them was on during certain hours of the day where the government turned it on” (lines 290-293). This was key to understanding her place in

time, history, and physical locations. Growing up this time period myself, I couldn't wait to watch many of the shows she talked about, especially "Muppet Babies" (line 303). This was just prior to the age of more restrictive parenting in relationship to television, food, and well before "reality television" and the end of Saturday morning cartoons. While her religion and practices may set her apart in some ways, her life overall was and is similar to most Americans her age. It was such an important counter narrative to the discourse about Muslims in our news broadcasts and in articles like Charen's (2001) and Preston's (2001) presented in *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.

This was where one chapter ends and another clearly began for her and her family. At the age of nine, her mom "wanted to move overseas to be closer to her other aunt [who had] moved to Saudi Arabia at the time" (lines 315-316). Through family connections, her dad was able to obtain a job in Saudi Arabia as an ER doctor. The family moved there for two and a half years. In her own words, Rose reflected

I think that that part of my life, even though I was nine and I moved back when I was twelve? That actually, I felt like was a first part in my life where I saw myself sort of beginning to change and learned to identify others. Not myself. I think learned more about the people around me, and I guess through learning about the people around you, you learn more about yourself. (lines 321-327).

When I asked what she meant by this, she gave the example of what she expected when she heard the term "Asian" as a child. That expanded when she began to meet people from all over East Asia. (lines 331-337).

One of the first impressions I had as a kid, you think that all Asians are Chinese, and, you know, that's not being prejudice or anything, it's just sort of like you

have this impression as a child. You don't know any better, and nobody ever clarifies it. So then I found out that there were like a lot of Pilipino, and a lot of, you know, a lot of people from all over the place, like Korea and Japan. So then I had a different understanding of East Asia. I met people from all over the world. You know, all over Europe, all over Asia and Africa. It sort of opened my eyes up to other people. One of my best friends in Saudi Arabia was from Ghana, and one of my other best friends was from Cypress, Turkey. I met girls from South Africa so you just **learn** a lot about different people and for me at the time, I guess I was ten, it just opened my eyes up to the world. (lines 331-347).

This isn't to say that she hadn't traveled before. She clarified at this point that though this was their first international living experience, they had been to Syria. "Every three years, to see our family, my mom's and my dad's family and learn Arabic," (lines 349-351) when they were younger. She said that it was very different though, "two very different worlds, and you sort of just have those two" (lines 354-357). She told me that visiting Syria while living in the U.S. and then visiting family in Damascus while living in Saudi Arabia was very different.

I was really young, you know, when like a girl would come to school and say 'yeah, you know, my brother or my father was drinking today.' And, you know, they're proud of the fact that they were drinking alcohol. Oh, you know, I was just really surprised because I thought Muslims quote un-quote 'don't drink.' And, you know, some people were proud of the fact that they didn't pray five times a day or they would wear shorts or you know what I mean? Umm like not

on par with like the modesty standards. So that, again, just like opened my eyes up to the fact that okay, being Muslim doesn't mean that everybody's practicing...I guess that opened my eyes because when you grow up, um growing up in my household, like we pray five times a day, we fast during Ramadan, and my family is, you know, practicing very much so. In Saudi Arabia, ....again, just like opened my eyes up to the fact that okay, being Muslim doesn't mean everybody's practicing. It's a good eye-opener. You just realize that people are very diverse regardless of what country they're from. Within your own faith, people are really diverse and, you know, practicing, non-practicing and then the country itself just left an impression on me too, because it's so strict. You have people who are very strict and people who because the religion's being imposed on them so much, they're trying to do quite the opposite (excerpted from lines 359-384).

This left Rose realizing, even at this young age, that she couldn't "really impose anything on anybody" (lines 386-387) and "people have to really want to do things for themselves" (line 389). Needless to say, at the end of her father's contract, her mother had realized that she didn't want to stay in Saudi Arabia. Rose summarized her mother's sentiments as "It's nice because there's Mecca, Medina, but otherwise it's not a place I'd want to live," (lines 394-396). Her dad looked at a job in the United Arab Emirates, but her mom urged her father to move the family back to the US and their old neighborhood.

Rose said that moving back to the area after two and a half years and trying to go to seventh grade was "hell" (line 416). Rose stopped to point out the historical



context and atmosphere; they had left in 1992 for Saudi Arabia and returned in the summer of 1994, with the Gulf War occurring in the interim. “When I came back, I thought the kids were the same people. They were the same people, quote unquote, but they were very different personalities.” (lines 418-420). She gave the example of encountering cliques on the school bus admitting, “I just thought that you meet up with the same people and you think that they’re, like, going to be the same as they were three years ago. I was very naïve and tried to befriend everybody” (lines 430-433). She was surprised by the conversations her friends were having at the back of the bus, focusing mostly on sex, so after three days and she got kind of tired of it and decided to sit up at the front of the bus with another friend.

Apparently, if you’re in the back, you’re cool. If you’re in the front, you’re a loser. I ditched the back folks and moved upfront and from then on they gave me hell all throughout the year. Big time, big time hell. And part of it was because I’d just moved back from Saudi Arabia and that I was Muslim and that I was Arab. (lines 448-453).

All of these things seemed to collide at once, as a simple social faux pas met with ethnic and religious tensions that had risen because of the Gulf War.

Maybe their experiences or their perceptions of foreigners or people different from them were shaped by the Gulf war, and I know that in that area there’s a lot of people whose families are in the military and a lot of people who’ve never lived outside the area. So some of the things they would say were like, you know, “do you guys drive Camels?” and they would make fun of everything,

really, like anything that had to do with, like, being Arab. Throughout the year.  
(lines 457-465).

While the school and classmate issue was difficult, a situation arose with their neighbor that was even more difficult in some ways.

Our neighbors, like they were the same **people**, but they became really rude to us, and, you know, we got on her grass once, and she like kicked us off the lawn. Basically, like, by the end of the year, we just decided to move / out to [a nearby community] because we knew they were a Muslim community and it was kinda growing. So as we moved and our neighbor was moving too, like towards the end, she actually came to apologize to us and she told my mom, “I’m really sorry, you know, about my behavior, “ and she sort of explained that it was because of impressions from media, from television, from whatever umm that they had changed her I guess, and after like having seen us for a year, she was like “you guys didn’t change. It was me. It was my fault.” (lines 478-500).

By this point, the family was ready to leave and Rose felt like things improved when they did. “It was a much better school, much nicer people. It was definitely much more diverse“ (line 504), she explains and that they stayed there from her junior high years on through high school and then she started college. It wasn’t until we held our second conversation that I learned a bit more about her high school experiences in this new neighborhood.

I had a pretty good diverse of friends in the beginning. I came into high school with this idea first because I was traumatized from what happened in eighth

grade. Then we moved out here, and so in eighth grade I was really timid about meeting people and being friends with people and I sort of had this fear that I was going to made fun of again so I tried to stay away from big groups. So usually during lunch, I hung out with sort of the odd group of kids that didn't really fit in anywhere. I actually really didn't like them very much. *(laughs)* I just hung out with them because I needed a group of friends and I was afraid of hanging out with popular kids 'cause I just didn't, you know, I didn't know what they were thinking. Then when I went into high school, I stayed with that same group of friends, but I had this idea that maybe I should become friends with the Muslim kids because we would all fit in together.

Later on in my freshman year, I think, I started to develop close relationships with them, even though growing up now I realize, I'm like "I didn't have to be friends with the Muslim kids." They were really good girls and they're nice and everything, but it was sort of a blanket. Here's this group of people who look different, and I'm different so we might as well be, you know, join forces and just be friends. I think that a lot of girls in that group didn't necessarily like each other, but I think they were more friends because they were either Pakistani or they were Muslim. I'm not Pakistani, but I thought it was interesting because looking back now, I'm like 'I just could have been friends with other people.' *(laughs)* Even though some of those girls I'm still friends with now. So we went through ups and downs in high school and we're still friends and that's like nine—more than nine—fourteen? Fourteen years later. Yeah, so high school I just befriended them throughout the year and I think by my senior year, I

became friends with a lot more different people. Just, you know, just a big mix.

I wasn't afraid, I guess, to be as different anymore?

I think that the reason I probably stuck with my Muslim friends in the beginning and gravitated towards them is because I think I was afraid of being different. Even though I didn't wear a scarf, I didn't really stand out much, except for the fact that when I'd look in the mirror, I felt like my hair wasn't blonde and my eyes weren't blue and so I felt like I did look different in my own view" (lines 1806-1833).

As a non-blonde, blue-eyed person myself, I completely related to this perspective. Most of the "popular" girls that I remembered from high school were blonde haired and blue-eyed, and once you add in the fact that I had the athletic prowess of a rock, I knew how it felt to feel different even if others didn't see it that way.

Rose recovered fairly quickly though, as she tells me,

Well, they're not really blonde, but they have blue eyes and so I had that little bit of a complex, but then I got over it. When I got older, like eleventh and twelfth grade, I think I became a lot more outgoing, and I was a lot less afraid of being different. I was a lot less afraid of just speaking out and making friends with everybody, and I was considering, well, I knew I was different, but I was considering putting on the headscarf when I was in high school. When I'd go to Syria and you know my teachers would, my religious studies teachers would, but they wouldn't emphasize it. They knew that we lived in the US and its

harder, but I look up to them a lot and I, you know, when you love somebody you sort of want to become like them.

I thought about it, and I thought about it a lot and then I had just decided that I'm not going to do it in high school. It's just, I don't want to go back to school one day and have to explain to everybody **who** I am and so I think the difference was more in my mind? That difference that I felt? It was something that was more that I felt inside, but it was not reflected on the outside as much, so maybe I was the one that felt like I'm Arab or I'm "not American" or I'm not "White"? Other people probably didn't see it like that as much as I felt it. So there was that side of me that that had those those feelings, I guess, and I wanted to express it, and so right, wearing a scarf would definitely express it but the other side of me was begging me not to do something that will get attention because I used to be very low key. Not anymore, like whatever.

I got a little more outgoing when I got older, but on the one hand, I was excited about doing that, but on the other hand, I just wanted to remain low key. And not stand out as much. And, so I saved it until after high school. I was like "yeah, I'll just when I graduate high school, I'll do that." So that that's after I graduated [in 2000], before I started college, I decided to start wearing the headscarf and at the time, too, it would have been more difficult 'cause nobody really knew who Muslims were. It might have been cool because you know, a lot of people had that image that a Muslim was somebody who looked very different or had different physical features or was not white or it might have been a cool thing for other friends to realize? 'Cause the only girl in the whole

school who actually wore a headscarf was one of my friends and she was Pakistani. I dunno. Hindsight is 20/20, but I don't know what difference it would have made? So that's kind of like my high school experience" (lines 1838-1881).

She talked about putting on hijab after high school and before college as very empowering and reinventing in a way.

It felt kind of nice to like walk into University especially if you know this is who I am and you have sort of a different introduction to you [by seeing me wear a head scarf]. It's the same but this is how, you know, you walk in looking a certain way and people don't expect that, you what am I trying to say?

I ask her to explain this a bit more in a later interview, and she said,

When I see somebody else who, like, who is wearing the hijab, the headscarf, at the mall or just other public spaces, I take a double look sometimes. I'm like, 'wait, that's another Muslim. Why do they look so foreign?' You know what I mean? It's like, it's something you hear so many times, you start to think it yourself. I mean it's not that bad, but it's just about realizing that our community is diverse, and America is the melting pot, it was built on foreigners. America's a bunch of people from all over the world, you know, and so that's why, theoretically speaking, people shouldn't be weird-ed out (*laughing*) by differences. " (lines 1602-1616).

It took some time for her to become comfortable with this, and she decided high school wasn't the place to begin.

In high school if I walked in class one day, it would be very weird and very different and so in college you just like meet people and that is who they are, that's what they are. It was sort of an opportunity to reinvent myself without having to explain why.

As a younger person, I was sort of more gung-ho about figuring myself out, and not because I had an identity crisis again, but because I was in the midst everybody else wondering 'who am I? What do I believe? Where do I stand, and what do I stand up for?' Traveling a lot when I was younger, too, I saw that the world is very, very, very diverse. And we came back to the US, and forgot the world is very diverse, and so when I'd come back from the summers in Syria K kept thinking 'You know what? I want to show people that there is a lot of diversity in the world and/ that's, one of the reasons why I was sort of encouraged to wear the scarf myself.' (lines 1067-1088).

Her story gets a little more complicated at this point. She warned me as she began "in the meantime," and told a story that parallels her parents' relationship story from earlier. Family friends who lived close by and were interested in her for their son contacted her parents (lines 513-515). They had never met her and didn't know that she was only eighteen, but invited her over to dinner "with the idea of like 'we could introduce him to her' and maybe, you know, they could get married." (lines 519-520). She reflected, "I guess we were interested in each other at the time," (lines 525-526).

And then we hit it off and then we decided, or our parents decided, "hey, how about, you know, we get them married." And he and I were talking and whatever, so we're just like, "oh, sure. Maybe, you know. It seems like a good

idea.” Actually I started my first semester of college at a local university, and by then he had moved out to California at the time. We confirmed that, you know, we’d get married but it happened really fast, so I did my first semester here, and then we got married at the end of the semester and I moved to California. First we moved to San Jose, so then I transferred Universities, and so I was at San Jose State for semester, and then he moved to Berkley to finish up his graduate studies or to start his graduate studies, so then I moved with him. I actually like graduated as a transfer student from UC-Berkley. Basically I did my last three years there. I moved to Berkley and then I took some classes at the junior college so that I had enough credits to transfer them there, because you can’t transfer in your second year so then I took two semesters at JC and I did a study abroad in Damascus, in Syria umm and **then** I transferred to Berkley you know, did all my double major there in urban development. It’s called urban studies. Like urban development and middle eastern studies

At this point, she reflected on a slightly earlier time.

When I was in junior college, that’s when September 11 happened. It was kind of crazy because I was driving to get to get to a small building on campus. I listened to the radio, and I heard them talking about it on the radio, and I was, like, **really** shocked. I didn’t own a TV. I just didn’t watch TV, I didn’t have a TV at the time, so news was off the internet and I didn’t check the internet or anything that morning, so (*inhales deeply*) I heard it on the radio, and then I turned it off because I thought it was a joke. Then I get to school, and the class only had four or five people in it. It usually had thirty, and so we talked about



it, and my jaw dropped. I was so surprised because I didn't believe that that was something that could happen in our country. (*Inhales audibly*) So honestly? I can't say that September 11 shaped my **life**, because it-I didn't really have any negative experiences. I think what happened was / well, actually no. I do take that back. I think it's sort of the atmosphere altogether in Berkley, the city of Berkley, like people are very open-minded and people are very nice and you just have such a diverse crowd that / that, if anything, people were coming up to me and were asking me if I was okay. (*laughs*) I don't think I was affected the same way that people living in the Midwest might have been, 'Cause I never really had a bad experience after that.

From sort of a religious perspective then, you know, people started becoming a lot more active, politically. Especially, like, the Muslim community, the Muslim Student Association, sort of bringing about awareness, of the religion and awareness of social issues, you know, and Muslim perspectives on social issues, women's rights, and on all sorts of things, you know? I was involved in a lot of the activism on campus, and a lot of like the MSA work and, you know, awareness work and whatnot. Because that's when people started using that as an opportunity to make the rest of the community aware of who were are. So, I just sort of brought myself to be active with everybody else. I felt, I feel like it was sort of every active Muslim or Muslim active individual responsibility to to sort of properly represent Islam and properly represent ourselves and who were are, because a lot of the focus, a lot of the limelight was on Muslims now. So I attended a lot of teach-ins, and then I would help with them.

I guess from that perspective, it helped me develop my identity and my personality more and just being in Berkley, there are so many people everywhere that you just become a lot more social. Wait. I decide to take it back. 9/11 definitely **shaped** a lot of who I am because it forced me to do things that I probably wouldn't have done otherwise. On a regular day, if it never happened, I don't think I would have ever felt like the burden or the responsibility to fix misrepresentations or misunderstandings. (lines 521-659). From here, we moved into a discussion of events that were fueled by 9/11 and the far-reaching implications these had.

You know the Iraq war started afterwards, and then there was that whole political thing going on, too, there were sort of two sides to the fence, right? In the meantime, like in two thousand and three, I went to Syria, Damascus and I did a study abroad. Over there, I studied Arabic. I was transferring, I was getting all my papers into Berkley, and I got in, so I took that one semester in Syria. I went to Damascus and that was, you know, it's own experience (*laughs*). I studied Arabic for God knows, like six hours a day, but it helped, in the end.

March 2003 when America invaded Iraq, I got a call from the U.S. Embassy and they asked us to leave, to go back. They said "this was going to happen, and you know, you probably want to consider it. We're flying everybody back home, so if you want to leave, you can leave." And I decided to stay, 'cause I asked, I'm like, 'are they planning on doing anything through Syria?' They said, 'we're not sure. Maybe, maybe not. We don't know, and so if you wanna,

go back.’ I sort of just decided to stay ‘cause, you know, at the same time, like my whole family, like my aunts and uncles and grandmother and everybody was there. So I said, ‘why? Why would I leave? My family is here.’

So then I finished, so then I came back to the US in August, and then I did my studies umm, you know, I went into Middle East Studies and then I also began Urban development and urban studies. In spring 2004, my relationship started to kind of get worse. I was, like, never, like, well in my marriage, I never felt like I was very **happy** in it? I just felt like something was missing, um and so things sort of just started kept getting worse, and in two thousand and four, in the summer of two thousand and four, it just sort of everything just kind of blew up and that was sort of the downfall, I would say. When things just started going sour, I was like, you know ‘let’s see a marriage counselor.’ That didn’t happen for a few months and then we did, well, I always tried to work things out because I didn’t want to be like sort of another divorce statistic? But we started drifting apart. We saw a marriage counselor a couple of times, and it didn’t really help. So spring of 2005 was my last semester, and I finished up school and graduated. I walked in May ’05, but I took summer school, and had like two classes left over the summer and then I officially finished in August. Right before then my ex-husband and I split up. We just had a separation at the time and I was kind of naïve. I was like, yeah, you know, maybe a separation would help. And it doesn’t really. It sort of, like, lingers, (lines 532-743).

Needless to say, between 2000 and 2005, Rose experienced a number of life changing events that all seemed to shape how she saw herself and the world. Life didn't stop with the end of her marriage, however. Life, in many ways, sped up.

I started working right after graduation. Right before I graduated, I got a job in San Francisco with link TV. Link TV's an independent media company, and they have their own TV station on satellite channel 94-10, and so they do a lot of documentaries, and they show different perspectives on things, you know, like one of their documentaries was about blood diamonds. They are showing the way that the rest of the world lives, with different perspectives. It's a really interesting channel. It's just sort of tries to open up people's minds, you know? See the rest of the world.

So then they had a program that I worked for specifically called "Mosaic." It was the –it was Mosaic quote unquote "World News from the Middle East" and I was one of the translators and broadcasters. I worked with internet for that program basically. We would bring in the news from the Middle East, from a couple of different stations, like, if something happens in Palestine or in Israel, we would bring in that story from the Palestinian perspective, from the Israeli perspective, and, you know, translate it into English. If something happened in Iraq, we would bring in Iraqi news, and from different stations from Iraq. It was a thirty-minute show so we'd bring in like one main story for it, and then other shorter stories.

The idea was to bring in news from the Middle East and translate it as much without bias as possible. We would then broadcast it, and we would dub our

voices over it. It was a really fun job, (*laughing*) actually. I learned a lot from there, and I met a lot of people because when you're working with media you just inevitably meet tons and tons of people.

I was home between graduation and September, but I'd never told my parents that we'd had a separation. So when I told them in September that, like, I lived somewhere and he lived somewhere, my parents **flipped** out because culturally that's not supposed to happen. That's just like a big no-no, and and at the time, I felt really empty inside. And you see me on the outside, I was faking happiness (*laughs*) you know it was really hard. My parents saw that, and they saw right through me. I was pretending that everything was fine, whatever, but they know me and of course they wanted me to move back to the Midwest. I kept saying no for the longest time. The 2005 year finished up and January came around and my parents, well, my dad, told my mom 'go out to California and just bring her back.' My mom came out, and she spent three weeks with me until I resigned from my job and packed up my stuff and came back to the Midwest.

At the end of January 06, I moved back home, but I'd taken to living by myself, >not by myself, but it was with two other friends who had turned into my best friends, as close as sisters. "Living on my own" was really, really helpful during that time. Then I moved back **home** and then spent a month or two figuring things out and then I we officially got divorced in April. I spent that next year sort of figuring out my life, and bringing everything back together and just figuring out what I was going to do with myself because I was like stuck in

the Midwest, you know? The rest of the year I spent volunteering. I did a few things with CAIR (the Council on American-Islamic Relations) but it just I felt like the Midwest had **so** little to offer compared to the West Coast.

I was trying to re-figure out life in generally, because basically all my friends were on the West Coast and I had a lot of things going on there and I knew everybody in the Muslim community there, the Arab community and they knew me and I was really active. Regardless of what was going on in my life, I was always really still active like in the community, in Berkley and in the Bay area especially for fundraisers or Muslim events or religious events. Moving here, like in my mind, I' kept thinking , 'this is only temporary. This is SO temporary, I'm so moving back there!' That was my goal for the **longest** time.

I knew on the other hand that I needed some time to sort of bring myself together and figure things out, but if I moved back out there it wasn't going to happen. It was because my family is so supportive and regardless of how much I love my friends, they're not going to be as supportive as my family, or my mother. Everybody has their has their own life to live. I spent months, like, talking to my mom and figuring myself out and talking to my dad and talking to my sister and just getting myself together again (lines 750-860).

Even seven years later, Rose seemed to really struggle knowing what to say about this period of her life, as she oscillated between her description of "getting herself together again" and the volunteer activities she took on in the meantime. Moving back to the volunteerism, she begins,

Then what else did I do? I did some ING work, which is Islamic Network Group or the ISB—Islamic Speakers Bureau work. going around and talking about the background of, Islam and I did a training over the summer for police officers and FBI. They flew me and somebody else out to Nebraska to do culturally sensitivity training. It was really interesting and I was like “oh my God! What am I doing here?” (*laughs*) But it was interesting.

It was me and another Muslim guy and a guy who’s a Sheik, and each one of us gave our perspective or like we talked about we talked about Islam. The Sheik guy talked about being Sheik and, you know, just cultural things like if you’re a police officer and you come to a Muslim’s door, offer to take off your shoes or if somebody offers you dinner or food or whatever it is, don’t be surprised. It’s not unusual and just things like that. That was one project. I did a lot of things that year. This is a long time ago. (*laughs*) but yeah, at the end of that year, I went to Hajj” (lines 876-900).

Of the four women I interviewed, Rose was the only one who had been on Hajj previously. Hajj is one of the five pillars of the Muslim faith and is a spiritual pilgrimage to Mecca and, for some, Medina. It’s often a once in a lifetime trip, as it is costly and time consuming, lasting several days and always a bit overwhelming as, on average, several million Muslims participate each year. Ashley shared pictures with me of her grandmother leaving for Hajj, and Amira talked about her desire to make the pilgrimage and some of the amazing stories she had heard about Hajj, but only Rose had already made the journey for herself—and at the age of 24 or 25.

That was a big experience for me. My parent had done when we were living in Saudi Arabia. I was too young, and I just did Omra, when you do the ritual visit, but the Hajj is a once in a lifetime thing. It would have been nice, but as an adult, you appreciate it so much more, and the difficulty of it, and the diversity of the people on the pilgrimage. You just see so many different things that you would see as a kid. As an adult, I thought it was really beautiful.

The fact that people are coming in from all over the world, and you know, the ritual side of it, and the spiritual side. It was really uplifting to me. I can't say that one event **changed** my life but, and they all add together. It was very significant, yeah, for sure. And it was it was sort of more significant because the day of Hajj fell on the day of my marriage anniversary? So I thought that was special, because looking back you know, I look back and I'm like "okay, wow." So instead of saying like "I got married on this day," I can say I did Hajj on this day. It fell on the exact day, which at the time it was very significant for me because of what I was going through (lines 910-942).

I found myself tearing up at her words. This was a story of healing, of moving forward, and of finding peace through faith—it was a story I identified well with. I remember well my own trip to London at the age of twenty with my college a capella choir. The day we travelled to Canterbury Cathedral especially had an impact on my life. More than just the home of Chaucer's famous story, it was a place many Christians travelled to for ages, a special place of prayer and Martyrdom. Though I came not seeking healing from the end of a marriage, I found a sense of healing from other emotional wounds.



Pilgrimages for people of Christian, Islamic and Jewish faiths especially, I think, play an important role in the telling of life stories. They serve so often as not only a reminder of historically significant events in the faith, but as significant events in individual lives, a sort of chapter end or beginning. For Rose, it seemed to mark both, as she returned home and began a path towards further education. She continues,

I had applied to the Architecture school at a local university 'cause I wasn't sure what path I wanted to take with life, and I said that in my application papers and I got in (*laughs*) because you know I did Urban development and I had a lot of artwork and a lot of things to show for it. In fall 2007, I started architecture and I did a semester and then I was like 'This is hell. This is archi-torture!' I took architecture history courses at Berkley and I loved them and I realized that there was a huge difference between being an architect, being the designer and then being just somebody who loves, architecture theory and development theory and history of architecture and so I took the semester after that off, in the spring of 2008. And then I decided to take summer school, just to see if I wanted to continue with it, and then over the summer I did the architectural engineering courses. Then I just realized that, yeah, I did great and I got As in the classes, but I realized that it's nice to go home, in the evenings, when classes are over. When I was in architecture studio, I didn't leave. You live there practically, and you're there until 3 am, 4 am. You know, there were days where I was there until 4 am; I would go home, sleep like three hours and come back at 8. It was crazy.

So then I decided not to go back and then I applied for a job as a medical interpreter, working with refugees and immigrants and interpreting for them with LAMP the Language Access Metro Project. LAMP is an organization that works with Catholic charities and they offer a bunch of different services but specifically LAMP does medical interpreting, like, medical and legal interpretation for immigrants and refugees, and they work with over thirty languages. I just decided to work with because I speak Spanish and I speak Arabic. My Spanish has gotten a lot weaker, but umm Arabic is, you know, really strong. I worked with them for a while and then I just decided to go into public health. I applied for a masters in public health at another local university and I got in 'cause I just d, you know what? I could use the degree for stability. I was working with immigrants and refugees and the economy was really bad at the time too, and so I'm like, you know what? Anything in a health field, I could probably get a job and it's really practical and if I wanted to do urban development and health and urban areas or environmental whatever it was, it could work for me. It's just such a broad field. >And it is. It's just really hard to figure out, like, "okay, what do I want to do with my life? What do I wanna be?"

The whole time, my parents are saying 'why don't you go finish your pre meds, and go to medical school? Why don't you finish your pre meds and go to medical school? Why don't you finish your pre meds and go to medical school?'" I kinda wished that I did that, but at the same time, it's like that's a whole other thing. Like your whole life is committed to medical school.

You're a doctor, you don't have a social life. I love being social! I just love being around people and I love being around friends and family, and I know medical school will take my social life away. I, you know, did my masters in Public health, and I finished in August and interned at the city health department. (lines 945 -1018).

She also reflects on the events happening outside of school at the time.

My sister was married in November, and I was in charge of everything in planning and organizing. It was a fun wedding and everything turned out great, and then I came back to work on a project. We had a fundraiser on December 3 that my sister and I were setting up, although she's primarily responsible for it. It was for unity productions foundations. They have produced a number of documentaries about Muslims and historical issues. They have a documentary about slavery in America and Muslim slaves. They have a documentary about Spanish Muslim prince called "Prince among Slaves."

This was one I was very familiar with, as I'd seen it at the Dar al-Islam Teacher's Institute in New Mexico over the summer of 2010. It's the powerful story of a Prince who had been captured, smuggled and sold to a farmer in Mississippi. He spent his whole life as a devout Muslim, teaching others, and it was 40 years before he was freed and returned to his native Africa, but forced to leave behind his children.

Rose continues,

we were doing a fundraiser for them. So we actually—Michael Wolfe and Alex Kronemer [ the executive producers and CEOs of Unity Productions

Foundation] were here. We raised a good \$200,000 or so for them, which was really fun but that took a lot of energy.

Around December 5, 2011, I started working full time as an epidemiologist.

Well, that's my main title, but I feel like that's a small part of my job. We look at epidemics and diseases. I keep an eye out, like, when it's we do surveillance of disease in (the area) so when it's my turn, which is like every three weeks, I spend a week doing the surveillance. There are different sites for that. The hospitals record how many illnesses they have and the reason for them, and school disease is found through the school nurses' reports. We keep an eye out on what's happening in the city, and so that's one project, and we've got a smoking project and we work on like a school improvement project, and we work so many different things, so I'm really scatterbrained. And I teach on Saturdays at the Saturday school and so, I started that before I started this job. The kids are really used to me and when the kids become used to you sort of as their teacher, to just sort of leave them in the middle of the semester and say "see ya!" (lines 1653-1674, 2402-2420).

Unfortunately, she did have to say "see ya" mid semester, but for good reason. As I continued to send transcripts and versions of the story back and forth to her, she told me she found herself in the midst of transition again. She moved to the east coast with a new opportunity. Her stint in the Midwest during adulthood, it turned out, was temporary, as she'd hoped.

## **Conclusions**

Rose conveys well the searching and reflexivity of her own emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000). However, this process did not occur for her during the traditional “window” of 18 to 25 years old, perhaps because she was married at the time. Though some identity decisions were made then, such as choosing to wear hijab and her college major, most of the time she describes as “finding” herself occurred after her marriage eroded. She had taken on many adult roles and responsibilities when she married at 18, and then relinquished some of this as she divorced around age 23. During this time, she moved back in to her parent’s home, and thought about the next steps she would take with her career, as she developed a passion to correct misunderstandings about Islam and mis-ascription of identities within the community.

It was her close familial ties that were crucial in forming these identity decisions. Moving away from California and back to the Midwest was, in many ways, about helping her find independence through a time of encouraged dependency; her parents and sisters encouraged her to volunteer and explore several possibilities before setting out on her own again. From attending Hajj on her wedding anniversary to volunteering with CAIR, her mosque, and the public health department, she learned well to navigate the in-between spaces of being Muslim, American and living in the Midwest. She knew better than anyone that no “box” on the census truly defined her, and she, as an outspoken and generative (McAdams, 2006) adult could share that message with all those that would try to define her.



**Figure V-1: Rose's Artifact: Laptop and laptop bag**

## VI Amira

Amira was a force to be reckoned with, and still partially in the midst of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000) during our meetings. Much like Rose and Hannah, Amira was incredibly busy with life, work and family. In her mid-30s at the time of our second interview, she chaired the arts department where she taught elementary school, and was in the process of writing a humorous memoir about her life experiences. While she articulated well her bicultural identities and many of her kernel stories illustrated misunderstandings about Islam and mis-ascription of identities, she was unsure of what might come next in life. She saw relationships, beginning a family and travel as part of her future goals, but was unsure as to where and when these would occur.

Her transition into adulthood was marked by major events. At the age of 21 and in her first year of teaching, the terrorist attacks on 9/11 occurred; she was living out of state, on her own and this greatly impacted her life, her attitude, and her experiences. Although she had not yet married or had children, familial ties were also of great importance to Amira's narrative; her parents' stories and voices wove through many kernel stories in her childhood, adolescence and emerging adulthood. Amira helped her parents with the mortgage and home renovations, and spoke about admiring her parents' dedication to her, her sister, and their places of employment. Between family and career, she was too busy for much else. It seemed that each time we were able to connect, much like Rose and Hannah, she grew even busier.

### **“We not only rock the boat, we'll turn it over:” Amira's Story**

While the dissertation work itself began in 2011, the pilot study that helped shape it was conducted in the summer of 2009. This is how I first met Amira. I had been

conversing with her for several months via email and phone before the IRB was approved and we were finally able to meet. I wasn't sure what to expect—I had no idea what she might look like, really.

I had been put in contact with her because we shared a common instructor and when he found out about my interests he immediately suggested her, thinking we might “hit it off” well. I knew that she was finishing her masters in Education at the time and that she taught elementary school music somewhere in the city. Other than that, and the fact that she was someone who had grown up as a Muslim in the Midwest, I knew almost nothing about her. When she arrived in a slightly unwound Hijab and sunglasses, I guessed that it might be her, but didn't want to stereotype.

She waived and smiled, obviously recognizing who I must be (the only pregnant lady waiting in the area), and then apologized for her lateness and appearance, explaining that their school was having a sort of festival of nations the next day, and she'd been helping other teachers paint some large paper flags for decorations. She already looked pretty tired, but seemed willing to still do the interview—especially once we found comfy chairs in the lounge and in the air conditioning. We had a good chat the first time, and as I sorted through the interview data later, I thought of her as someone I'd love to chat with again.

As she graduated shortly thereafter, we lost touch. I tried contacting her through avenues I had at hand, but nothing worked. I was certain that I'd not be able to include her story and experiences in the final dissertation. Through a strange turn of events (and a mutual friend), we were reconnected two and a half years later and I was so fortunate to hear more of her story and experiences and even sit in on one of her music classes.



Amira is one of those incredibly passionate and driven people; the kind where her energy is infectious and you find yourself speaking faster and faster the longer you're together as the excitement builds. Most of our second interview, in fact, probably isn't found in the pages of this story; we just began to talk about friends, ethics, our own religious beliefs and struggles aside from "life story narrative."

While passionate describes Amira well, so does sarcastic as I quickly found out. When she first thought about her artifact to share with me, it was a clear example of something that helped contextualize her physical placement and her placement in time. It was an old newspaper insert on "Moslems" where local reporters had come around to the "mosques," observed and taken pictures (See figure VI-1). Both she and her best friend were pictured as eight or nine year olds on the pages. "Look at the spellings, Emily!" She said to me several times. "They knew nothing back then about Muslims. I mean, I already knew that because of the questions kids in school would ask, but look at this! Written by professionals!" As we continued talking, however, she told me that she was working on her own memoir, titled *Walk like an Egyptian*. She described it as comedic and sarcastic and though she was not finished, offered to send me her introductory chapter. This is where I discovered her flow chart, and how most conversations tend to go when people find out that she's Egyptian (see Appendix IV). This illustration, more than the photos or misspellings from the newspaper, helped me to understand a bit of her experience, I think, through tears of laughter. She's learned to laugh about it because, "well, what else can you do?"

We began, talking about family and living here. "My parents came to the states '76," she told me,

and I was born in '78, here in the Midwest. My dad came with a degree in Engineering, my mom with her degree in medicine. So they had high expectations when they came here, because they kind of build themselves from the ground up. They came from Egypt. I forgot to even mention that, but before they had come to the states, my dad had worked in Algeria for a couple years or so.

We moved around when I was young. Like, I think when I was one year old, we went to Chicago. When I was two, we went to Dallas. Finally, my dad settled and got a job at [a well known engineering company] here, and he still works for them. My mom had passed her medical board exams, but she did not do her residency because they had asked her to move to another city, and she's like, 'I have a daughter who needs a lot of attending to.' Apparently I was a hand full. So my mom never did that, but then when I was around fifth grade, my mom started doing research at [an area university], and she's still there now. She works in retrovirus research. They have very high expectations, which I don't wanna say "brown people" but like, you know, like a lot of Indian doctors here, Pakistani doctors, engineers, well, my whole family is doctors and engineers back in Egypt. I'm the black sheep—music educator that—I'm weird according to them." (lines 10-51).

However, her family had also been fiercely supportive of her, even from a very young age.

My mom told me this story of how my kindergarten teacher called my mom and said, 'Amira doesn't know her alphabet.' My mom's like, 'Amira knows the

Arabic **and** English alphabet, what are you talking about?’ It turned out that it was the Kindergarten teacher’s first year, and she didn’t bother to ask me to recite the alphabet. She assumed I didn’t know because my parents were not American. My mom said, ‘she knows how to sing it. Why don’t you call on her?’ You know? She’d already put that on my report card, that I didn’t know the alphabet. Without even bothering to check. That’s how few Arabs there were. It was just me then, in the school,” (lines 886-902).

Teachers, then, made a lot of assumptions.

We talked a bit more about her K-6 experiences and Randall school, which she attended for the entirety of elementary school.

There were two other Egyptian girls that were friends of the family that went through that school, along with my sister. We were the only ones, and everybody assumed we were sisters. We were not even related! We would just tell people we’re cousins just because oh my goodness! Egyptian? More than one Egyptian family? That’s just crazy. So we just told everybody. We’re ‘yeah, we’re cousins.’ We hung out all the time, but one was older than me, one was younger than me. They started when I was in first grade, and then that’s kind of what started it all. I was always doing presentations on Egypt and on Islam. Islam, back then, was seen more of a cultural thing than religious, and people didn’t know what we worshipped. They thought we worshipped the moon. No, **seriously**. They’re like, “do you worship **camels?**” I’m like “Camels? What do camels have to do with anything?” You know? I guess they associate Arabs with camels.’ There was nothing around me in my grade

but I felt—I mean there were times that I felt more American than anything else” (lines 95-122,167 -168).

Her story, more than any other, oscillated quickly between her own experiences as a student and her experiences as a teacher, working with immigrant families. She reflected,

I mean our kids have it much better than we had it. I would always be the one doing the speeches about Islam, and, you know, and I’d be fasting and sometimes I’d—I would just sit in the cafeteria. Nobody gave me the option of going and sitting elsewhere [during Ramadan]. Whereas now, like, I have kids that come and they’re welcome to pray in my room if they want to. I don’t go and tell the parents or condone it, but I just, well this one mother particularly, she’s like ‘do you mind if they come so they don’t miss their midday prayers?’ I’m like ‘by all means. I have a rug in there they can use.’ Adults, other adults perceive me, well, I mean I was always different from the beginning, just because I was one of –of nothing, you know, in this part of the city” (lines 148-165).

While she did really know her alphabet and was comfortable talking about Egypt and Islam, there were parts of the language she struggled with.

My parents spoke Arabic with me at home and going into Kindergarten, I was bilingual. My problem was I did not know when I was speaking Arabic, and when I was speaking English because, to me, they were just all words. So I’d say like a sentence half in English, half in Arabic and my teacher would be like, ‘I’m going to take that out of context, and just make a guess’ (lines 172-187).

The harder part for her and her family wasn't in dealing with a perceived language barrier—it was in the cultural differences between Egyptian and American schools.

I mean here in the states, schools make it a point to do family activities outside of the school day, whereas other countries don't necessarily do that, and my parents weren't used to that. So when they would have like a skate night or something like that, I thought—I remember breaking down and crying in class one time because I thought we were required, like I'd be in trouble if I did not go, and nobody explained to me. And it's funny 'because now I get parents, like, Iraqi parents, and they'll say, 'is there something going on tonight?' and this is, like, an event that's been >broadcasted ten million times. We even sent a computerized message home to the parents. You know what I mean? They don't—they don't get it because they don't know that we do other things with the family. It just does not stop at 4 o'clock when they leave. So that was a difficulty. That was just more of a cultural thing. And my parents weren't opposed to it, but they just weren't used to it" (lines 189-214).

Many times throughout our discussions Amira shared that her school experiences, and especially those difficult ones, were the reasons she became a teacher. She also expressed feeling fulfilled by helping other kids who had been like her and parents that were much like her parents as she was growing up. "My parents have always done a good job of trying to keep up with the way things are," Amira told me, "but they kind of had to learn it the hard way—through **me**. My [younger] sister had it a whole lot easier, 'cause they just knew what was going on" (lines 224-229).

It was during our second interview together that I discovered this was really only half of the picture. It was this desire to help others coupled with a fantastic and encouraging music teacher that really seem to drive her towards becoming a teacher. She told me,

Our grade school music teacher, she—well, I was always getting those notes home that said ‘Amira is very smart, but she talks too much.’ Always. And so I was one of those kids that was like, you know, “she’s not vicious, but (laughing) she needs to shut up.” And I look at kids like that, that I have? And I’m like, “sorry. I’m sorry. “I’m really sorry!” Umm but my music teacher kind of plucked me out of that, considering I was creative-minded and they say I was intelligent although I never wanted to do the gifted program ‘cause I didn’t want to be a nerd, you know. [My parents and teachers] tried to push me to do that ‘cause they thought I could, but I was like “uhhhh no. No, I don’t want to.” My music teacher plucked me out of that and she put me in gifted music, which encouraged me.

Then junior high and high school, I had the same music teacher [throughout] because (my district) is junior high-high, so I had the same choral teacher, whom I actually saw a couple of weeks ago at the Symphony umm and you know, I look back and realize that he encouraged me to do solo and ensemble competitions. He encouraged me to do these things that I would have never...I knew I had talent, but I never would have pursued because that’s just not what my family does. Because of that, I’ve always been the person who was creative and outside the box and/ you know, just kind of doing my own thing, whereas,

umm, the rest of the, like, the rest of my cousins and family? All engineers or doctors. All. You know, I wouldn't have had the opportunity to be who I was had I been over there in Egypt" (lines 1418 -1448).

We skipped over middle school experiences for the most part and talked quite a bit about high school.

That time was probably the worst and the **best**, more so than junior high. Like junior high was like, I don't even remember it. Usually people are like, 'I hated junior high!' I don't even remember much about it. High school? I started becoming popular. The expectations of others about dating and expectations of drinking grew. I don't do either, and I had to keep to it. I mean, and this is God's blessing, but I guess I was just paranoid and conscientious enough to stay away from those things.

I was occasionally pushed into it. Like a guy would ask me out, and I didn't know what to say to him. He didn't get it that I didn't date, you know? I went out on a date, and he's trying to kiss me, and I'm like "nononononono!" I would avoid him at school after that, and he's like "why did--what did I do?" But he didn't get it. That understanding wasn't there. They didn't understand that there are places in the world where people don't date in the sense that they do here. I would meet guys and I talk to them and we get to know each other and stuff like that, but the intentions are marriage. It's never **casual** or anything. You know how I was saying that I was in between, you know, I'm both and neither? That was probably more so in high school because I had to **fight** for **everything** I got to do. It was such a battle to do anything. I came back

from college, and my sister's curfew is late and other things I didn't experience.

I'm just like, "I didn't get to do any of this!" But I was a first born and I'm a daughter" (lines 237-280).

Again, we went back and forth in time as we looked at her experiences and the experiences of her sister later on. This self positioning, perhaps more than anything else about her story, was where I really connected with her. I was a first born daughter myself, first experiencing life as a minister's child and, as a teenager and beyond, as a religion professor's daughter at a Christian college. I knew the expectations and was luckily able to avoid most of the peer pressure as well, not drinking or smoking or dating. Well, not dating at least until my senior year of high school. My younger sister probably went on her first date somewhere around eighth grade and did have a much later curfew than I did. I'm not sure how much of the boundaries within which I lived my life had to do with actual parental expectations and what I perceived. It always felt like a fight though, and a fight my sister benefitted from as my parents learned from experiences with me, especially when it came to social events and setting a curfew. This struggle for independence and to meet expectations led us to a similar place as well: clinical depression during high school.

I was diagnosed with clinical depression during that time. That's another cultural thing. This country is more circled around psychology and emotional, you know, disabilities and things like that and yeah, you have families here, it's hard to swallow. Over there, psychology is a joke. Thankfully it was my dad that I had more problems with, but I'm a lot like my dad, so we butt heads on everything. My mom, being the doctor, and being more open-



mindful, and forward-thinking, was like 'It's a physical problem, and we have to deal with it like a physical problem.' So my mom's the one that had her head on her shoulders. For example, of the cultural difference I mean, I have a cousin, my mom's side, who has borderline personality disorder. They didn't know what it was. They thought they had to exorcise demons, which, in Islam, we do believe things like that, but / it has to be an extreme case. You know what I mean? Like it's not like every emotional disability is that case.

At the time, though, The principals at the time at [my high school] were pricks. They basically said—well, let me back up. At the time I was going to be a doctor. My science grades in chemistry, biology, physics went from an A to close to a D. I mean, you know, that's what happens when you're depressed. You don't do anything. Even theater just wasn't the same for me. Choir wasn't the same, and my teacher noticed that. My parents had a meeting with my chemistry teacher and some administrators, and basically the guy suggested to my dad "maybe your daughter's on drugs." My dad threw a fit. Like that is something you just don't say (excerped from lines 289-335)

We moved away from the discussion of depression, as she transitioned back into the discussion of the struggle for independence with her family and friends.

Things started picking up my junior year and stuff. And then it was a fight to go away to college. Well, it was a fight to want to be a music teacher. I had good music education from the beginning, and then it was a fight to go off to college, and then it was a fight to stay in the dorms, and it was a fight to stay in my own

apartment. ((laughing))—Like everything after that [incident with the Chemistry teacher and administrator] was a fight (lines 340-347).

I thought I understood—this was about family and keeping her close. She had other insights to add.

It was also because ‘what would people say? What would people say a Muslim girl living away from home, going to college?’ Well what’s is that like that that group of people like that I’ve grown up with here in [this city]. Everybody’s like ‘Wow, you get to go away—you get to go away to college and blah blah blah. You get to do this.’ I was the first one to go away to college and it was my mom that convinced my dad, but everybody was convinced it was a bad idea except them.

One of my mom’s friends like her daughter is my age—she’s married and has a kid now. She was like, ‘oh Amira is not going to last more than a year there.’ She told this to my mom, and my mom who’s very soft spoken but very strong-willed was like, ‘you don’t know my daughter. You obviously don’t know my daughter. Just keep an eye on your own daughter.’ Her mom was fiercely in support of her through the whole process. However, Amira wasn’t just facing friends who were second-guessing her. “When I went to Egypt, my family would bug me, ‘why are you being a music teacher? You’re not going to make any money.’ I’m like ‘It’s America. What are we going to do with a bunch of doctors and lawyers? Somebody has to do other stuff.’ (lines 349-381).

While her passion for music and confidence in her choices were striking, it was her next choice that took me even more by surprise. Upon finishing college, Amira took a teaching job in Austin, Texas.

I stayed there for three years. Austin is such—it's not even Texas. It's such a liberal city. It's more liberal than a lot of the other cities I've been to. It's just wonderful. They've got just a lot of things to do. A lot of cultural awareness. I met people through other people and then got to know all these friends that went to UT and umm, you know, that campus is huge. It has a large Islamic studies program and that was the first time I had ever seen or even been a part of a university, [even though I wasn't a student] that had a large Muslim community. I didn't have that experience in college.

There were a bunch of FOBS that were—sorry. FOBS are 'Fresh off the boat.' These guys come from like Pakistan and Afghanistan, you know, or other arab countries that are there for their computer science degree or engineering.

'Cause they're all there for that and they were just like, 'Women are neither seen nor heard.' I'm like, 'that's not Islamic. That has nothing to do with our religion.' It's just a patriarchal thing. It's part of the culture more so than the religion. But in Austin, there were people my age that were Muslim and then I met these girls that wore the hijjab. When I got to know them, well, my first impression of them was 'wow they must be really religious.' When I got to know them, like, they were pretty normal, you know? I didn't know why I had this perception that only daughters of an Imam or sheih wear hijjab and nobody else did. That was my impression. In Austin, made so many friends

there and plus Houston was like Middle East and south Asia in Texas. It's a little like Dearborne, Michigan (lines 385-434).

Next, she returned to her college experiences to help explain how much of a change life in Austin was for her.

In college, when I lived in an apartment, I lived with roommates, with two close friends. It was two Catholics and a Muslim. One of them drink like a fish. It was—it was kind of funny. It was just interesting because it was like ying and yang. She was, you know, she did all kinds of drugs in high school and just blah blah blah, and she drank all the time and she was just kind of carefree, and I was, like, didn't do anything, but we got along so well. It was really funny. I think we both kind of complimented each other in that sense.

I moved to Austin, lived by myself, and that was August of 2001. In my first year of teaching, living in Austin, working in East Austin, there were low SESes, a lot of kids were fresh off the boat with a lot of uneducated parents. I mean, you know, that doesn't mean they don't have compassion, but they may not have the right information. On 9/11, the counselor came in and gave me a letter. She said, 'read this, but don't react.' I had kindergarteners in my classroom. She's like, 'read this, don't react.' I said, 'okay.' My heart dropped and the only thing *—and* maybe this is selfish, but the only thing I thought was 'please don't let it be a Muslim that did this.' I was seriously for awhile afraid that we'd be put in camps. Like the Japanese. All I could think was, 'that's it. My life is over.' It reminded me of the Oklahoma City bombing. I thought, 'why did they jump to the conclusion a Muslim's responsible?' I didn't know

the news then, and I really interested in the news. I was never really politically minded, but I was more socially minded, more like the whole multicultural aspect and stuff,” (lines 491-519).

She wove together connections between international events and the American connection to Israel.

I never understood the conflict—the Palestinian/ Israeli conflict, considering my best friend was a Palestinian. We never really talked about it that much. All she told me was stories of, like, her dad getting hauled off to jail because he was out on his porch past 8 o’clock, things like that, you know? So I—but I didn’t understand it because people kept saying ‘it’s two-sided,” but she was like “no!” she tried to make me understand, saying, “No, they have the guns—we don’t.” After the Oklahoma City bombing thing, I was like ‘why are people jumping to that conclusion?

I was immediately drawn to her discussion of the Palestinian/Israeli conflict as it had been an reoccurring theme in *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch* analysis. Much like the articulation that it was “two sided,” and yet having a Palestinian friend explain that it did not feel two sided, the discourse in the community often illustrated how one-sided most felt the issue was. It was interesting, too, that she drew upon the Oklahoma City bombing for reference. This seemed to be at the forefront of Hannah’s mind as well in the moments and days following 9/11. Oklahoma City did not come up at all with Ashley or Rose, and I had to wonder if it’s because they are a few years younger than the other two women. Amira continued with her remembrances of 9/11 and the days following.

I remember kids not wanting to come in my classroom because I had told—and again this was before I wore the scarf—but when I introduced myself, I told them that I bilingual too, you know? Because I wanted them to identify with me and understand that it's okay that you speak two languages. It doesn't make you weird or anything, you know? It's actually quite an asset to have. But, you know, there were some kids that...I worked with awesome people and some teachers were like, 'okay, so and so doesn't want to come in here, but I told him he has to, and I'd like him to participate,' you know? And I was like, 'It's okay. If the kid doesn't feel comfortable now, like, it's not his fault, it's his parents for spewing crap, you know?' When it's an 8-year-old, what are you going to do? One first grade teacher had her kids all made cards for me. It was really cute. And then they just like opened it up and like when I came in, they had all opened up, and they kind of read their cards and stuff like that" (lines 520-558). Our administration as well said, and of course she was talking about me, but I was obviously in tears that day, and she announced, 'If there are any children or parents that make any comments towards any religion or race or ethnicity, it is to be nipped in the bud.' They made it sound general, but obviously with the offense that had happened, that had occurred, it was about me. I never felt like, 'Oh my god. I'm going to stay in my house and not do anything.' I did stay home maybe a day, just because like people were saying, 'stay home and just rest. You're away from your family, it's your first year of teaching which is like sink or swim anyway,' (lines 560-575).

I remembered thinking much the same way about my first year of teaching. I was newly married and we'd moved only a few hours away from my family, but it definitely felt like it was 'sink or swim' time. My great grandfather died that fall, on the day I was supposed to start a unit dealing with family in my class. It was hard, but I knew that staying away or staying home and doing nothing wasn't an option. It only intensified the isolation and so, I liked to think that perhaps I understood a bit of her reaction here, wanting to return to school and have things feel as normal as they can during that first year of teaching, which never really felt normal anyway.

It's what Amira did next that most amazes me. She explained why, in the weeks and months immediately after 9/11, she started wearing a head scarf (hijab).

Since Ramadan was in December that year, I just decided to do this lesson about like the three major religious holidays or whatever. Well, not just the three—I did Kwanzaa too. The holidays that were in December and I had to explain to them that 'you know, Ramadan's not always in December. Here's what we do.' But the kick was when I waited at the door for them to come, I was wearing a headscarf, and some of them just kind of like, froze. They said, 'what are you doing?' 'What are you wearing?' I said, 'nobody's going to get hurt. Just come into the classroom.' Then we had a discussion. I asked them, 'Am I still the same person?'

'Yeah, you're the same person.'

Okay, then what's the problem?

'Well you're wearing that thing like they wear on TV'

I'm like, 'oh yeah. Well, there's bad and good people everywhere.'

So we had to have that discussion because obviously they hadn't—maybe they had, but in a different way.

Then I started wearing hijab [regularly], but first it was in the Spanish style, which is this—bare neck, just trying things out. And then finally I was like 'that's it. Just put it on. It's just hair. Who cares?' It became this kind of a form of identification for me. In meeting all of those American Muslims, you know, I felt like from then on I kind of began to identify myself as a new culture. I wasn't American, fully. I wasn't, you know, Egyptian fully. I was an American Muslim. That's it. Like, it's like the first generation of brown people. I don't know how else to describe it. You know, there's tons of us now that are in different professions, and we go into different professions because we feel like we need to be represented in different professions.

That's kind of the way the world is moving right now. Especially since after 9/11, everybody was like, 'okay, what's—what's this Islam? Like I thought they worshipped the moon. Or camels.' So people started to want to know about us, so that's kind of—that's kind of how it started. It was religious and it was an identification thing, too, for me. That was a tough year.” (excerpted from lines 473-647).

It also seemed to have provided opportunities for expanding community connectedness as well.

It took me until after college to kind of expand and meet Muslims. I moved down to Austin because one of my friends what I went to high school and college with moved down there. In college, I used to out to bars with friends,



but I never drank, I never did anything, but I even felt guilty doing that because I thought, 'I'm around this atmosphere. I just don't feel comfortable doing that anymore.' So I kind of just made a decision, saying, 'I'm outside of college. It's time to grow up. I'm not going to be in that environment,' and I told Ellen, my friend who lived down in Austin and I was like, 'If we go somewhere, I mean if we go to dinner and you have a wine or a beer, that doesn't bother me, but I don't want to go to a 'bar.' I don't want to go to that setting anymore.' She understood and then when I met a lot of Muslim friends, she was really really happy for me. She's like, 'that's good. You needed that to kind of identify yourself' (lines 439-456).

After several years in Austin, however, she was presented with a new opportunity.

I got the opportunity after Austin to study in Egypt for a year, studying Middle Eastern music. I studied Arabic—I mean I already knew Arabic, but reading and writing was still a joke. I was on a first grade level. I taught English too—at a center and so I ran out of money. *Laughs*. I mean, like, I was earning pounds, Egyptian pounds, not dollars. So I was taking out of my savings until I was like, "I need to go somewhere rent free and get a job. Get a real job" (lines 460-472).

Therefore, a year in Egypt led to moving back to the Midwest and with her parents. She started teaching music at a charter school where she continued to teach talmost a decade later. "I mean, it would have to take a really good offer for me to give up this job," she told me, "just because, like, I'm really used to the kids and the parents at this point. She expressed a real sense of belonging and being needed by the families.

There's a lot of there's a lot more Arab kids coming in just because I'm there, and I think I guess they feel like they're able to communicate with teachers as long as I'm there because they can just call me and say eh especially the ones that don't speak English, they say "I don't know how to call the office and tell them that I have to keep my kid home today because they're sick," and I was like, "it's not a problem." I'll let them know. You know, and sometimes I translate, or I have to, you know, I guess reiterate points from the teacher to the parent if the student is not doing their work or, you know, any problems arise, stuff like that. So that's a big incentive for me to stay" (lines 851-865).

Falling in line with McAdams' (2006) research findings, Amira seemed to be a very generative person in adulthood because of two particular themes that ran through her childhood. She was seeking to give back to others because she felt as if she was given a number of opportunities as a young person. She gave back also because she watched others, like her parents, struggle with cultural differences and she wants to make it somewhat easier for a new generation. She still saw the struggles, but felt as if her teaching position made it possible for her to better advocate for families who were much like her own.

However, this often meant being the first Muslim in particular areas, and especially in Education Administration and in the Education Administration masters program.

It's funny because like going through all my classes, I'm still the Islamic representative, you know? I'm kind of used to it by now. Especially going in at admin. There aren't very many people—that's why I did it was because like I

feel like our Islamic schools need to be just as academically competitive as public schools, as parochial schools, as charter schools. I mean and I work at a charter school right now. K-8 and we have a large Muslim population. Iraqi, Somali, Kenyan, and Bosnian. Lots of Bosnians. When I'm at work, if there's anything that needs to be translated, it's my job because I can talk to these parents." Ever humble, she confides, "I try my best, but my mom has to check my grammar" (lines 733-750).

Another arena where she helped out was at home.

I live at home with my parents and I'm almost 31, but in our culture it's not a big deal. I help my parents with the mortgage. You know, it's just me and them. I was going to move out and just get my own place. I was like 'I don't have any space. I can't live in a little room anymore.' I went from living in my own apartment, you know? To this. I can't do this. I was like "I'm just going to move out." And I was looking at places. My dad's like "we've been wanting to redo the basement anyway so we can sell the house eventually, so why don't you just stay with us, and you can help us out with the mortgage?" It's kind of a sweet deal. But I don't know what to say to people when I'm like, "I live at home." It's because it's such a weird thing in this culture. Like everybody has their own house, but to me, I'm like "I don't even know if I'm going to stay here all my life, so what's point of buying a place or paying rent when I can—I have a sweet deal?". And plus my dad needs to retire, and I need to help him with the mortgage. I feel bad. Being at [that engineering firm] that long, they don't give you crap when you retire at [that place]. (lines 751-776).

However, she seemed to struggle with not only her father's acceptance of treatment in the workplace, but also ways in which her father accepted and reasserted assimilation expectations.

My dad just reiterates over and over again "and we're white. We're Caucasian." I'm like, "I don't feel Caucasian." (laughs). Let's be honest here, you know? But my dad is a person who doesn't like to rock the boat. That's just the way he is. He likes to live his own life in peace. I saw him go to one protest ever in my life, and it was the Egypt protest this time last year... Like my sister and I? We not only rock the boat, we'll turn it over. She's not as outspoken as I am, but when she has something to say, it's with a lot of thought. It's very intelligent. My dad jokes all the time that my sister's (laughing) going to get us thrown in jail. You know? And we're like, "dad, whatever. We're American citizens. We can say what we want, we're not hurting anybody (excerpted from lines 1235-1270).

I asked her about how she answered the census race question, and her response was both engaging and complex.

I used to say "White" 'cause technically North African is Caucasian. At University, I put "Black or African American" because technically? I have African citizenship, so (laughs) I saw it as technically, you know? Or I would joke with my black kids, like, "I'm more African than you are!" [For] 2010 uh census they had this campaign! It was put on by Arab Americans and the campaign was called "Check it right—you ain't white."

(laughing) and I was like, “that’s hilarious! I’m checkin’ my own box!” Just

because it was so hilarious, I wanted to check my own box. At this point?

Yeah, I do say “other,” or sometimes I don’t even do anything. If I don’t see a need, I’m like, ‘ I don’t feel like writing it in.’ (excerpted from lines 1188-1208).

Amira had no trouble standing out and expressing her bicultural identities, but standing out had been tiring at times. As we talked about jobs and community involvement a little bit more in the later interview, she told me,

To be honest? Like, lately? I mean, I feel religiously numb lately, just because I feel like my life is going so fast with work to the point where it’s just like I’m either working or I’m tired, whereas I used to have lot more time to read the Qur’an more often, I’m just like, I feel like I need to get that back up. It’s there, it’s just buried! It’s buried under the sheets, under which I sleep (lines 1622-1634).

Yet, she was still so comfortable sharing the stories of faith and the reasons behind traditions that we easily moved into a conversation about Hajj, and some of the history and practices behind this important event in a Muslim’s life

Unlike Rose, Amira had not had the opportunity to go on Hajj at the time of our interviews, but described it as something very important to her.

First of all it’s one of the pillars of Islam. Second of all, it’s supposed to be that after you complete Hajj it’s supposed to be a clean slate for all your wrongdoings, basically. So it’s kind of like being reborn. The whole purpose of it is to number one, see how Islam goes cross culturally, you know, it’s no, well,

kind of like how Malcolm X came back and he said, “I was praying in Mecca alongside a blonde haired, blue eyed devil”? You know, stuff like that. So he was like, that’s why he denounced Nation of Islam, because he was like, this isn’t a racist religion, so I don’t agree with it.

And then umm it’s also supposed to be because, you know, prophet, Peace be upon him, was a spiritual leader and an **example**, like it wasn’t just you know, wasn’t just him saying what Muslims need to do or revealing the Qur’an through the angel Gabriel, but showing us how to live our lives and one of the things he did was go to Hajj. It also symbolizes [a change] because the Kasbah pre-Islam used to be a home for polytheism, and there were idols that they worshipped uh in the Kasbah itself. After Islam became more spread through Saudi Arabia, it became a symbol of spirituality taking over that region, a different monotheistic spirituality taking over. So that’s why [Mecca is] such an important place to Muslims. A lot of the rituals that are done there are symbolic of the hardships that the first Muslims went through.” (lines 1642-1667).

“Well, and I feel like, to me, when people go to Hajj, it’s kind of like a renewing of the faith because people in this day and age it’s easy to get lost in our own personal emotions. It’s an individualistic society so people are selfish in a way and they forgot the real spirituality behind, like, you know, all this anger behind stuff? And you look back at the way the prophet lived and you’re like, “this was the most chill man to ever roam the earth.”

While these stories may not initially seem to coincide with her life story, to me they became part of it. They showed how stories of faith had become part of an oral tradition that she shares, both in her words and in her life. The ways in which she told the story and lived the life of self-control, love, faith and sacrifice for others portrayed just how much a part of her life scripture and belief had been and were her. She recalled these stories of faith with such passion and even animation in her voice that you couldn't help but become enraptured. Though she was (at the time of the second interview) in her mid-thirties, her identity in faith and culture were very solid, very grounded and established as such through story—her family history, her faith history and her own life experiences.

### **Conclusions**

Looking at Amira's story, it was difficult to tell where "emerging adulthood" may have ended and where "adulthood" might have begun, nor was it the intention of this study to define such moments. Much like Rose, she became independent and shouldered responsibility very quickly, but found herself returning to her parent's house in her mid-twenties. Amira, however, used this time apart from family to explore who she was, developing close relationships with Muslim women outside her family in Texas, and studying music and culture in Egypt by herself for a year. When talking about her identity, She focuses much of her narrative on being in-between (Sarroub, 2002). She positions herself outside the census boxes, "both and neither" with family and friends, and through her bicultural experiences in local schools and abroad. As she pointed out the misunderstandings and mis-ascribing of identities, she found that became something new: part of the "first generation of brown people."

She was truly comfortable as a “black sheep of the family,” but was also quick to show respect for her parents and family members that sought to assimilate and blend into the background. In fact, the places where she talked about these strong familial ties—in disagreeing with her father or in finding support in her mother—stood out as moments that helped define and strengthen her. Amira was the kind of story teller, teacher, writer and thinker that seemed so rare; she was grounded to her identities through familial ties, faith, and a strong generative nature, but was also very approachable, down-to-earth and relatable.



# Growing Up Islamic In St. Louis

**Story by Pamela Schaeffer**  
Post-Dispatch Religion Editor

**Photos by Wes Paz**  
Of the Post-Dispatch Staff

Student: "Is it all right if a guy comes up to me in the hall at school and puts his arm around me in a friendly way?"

Islamic teacher: "No, it is forbidden."

**I**MAGINE being a high school student in one of St. Louis County's large school districts — Parkway or Lindbergh, say, or Ladue — and being forbidden to date, or even go to parties with a group.

For most American teenagers, such restrictions would prompt cries of foul, if not a flurry of letters to Ann Landers fulminating against parental injustice.

number of young people here, the formidable list of "don'ts" represents more than a generation gap. It signifies the challenge of their Islamic heritage — a religion that their parents, Moslems in an alien American culture, are increasingly encouraging them to live.

Islam is one of the world's largest religions, with about 700 million adherents worldwide. Yet it is so new to this country, and so marginal in its influence, that it is hardly mentioned in even recent books on the nation's religious faiths.

About 270 Islamic youngsters who attend a weekly religious school in midtown St. Louis have little experience of Islam's greatness in many parts of the world. But the students are finding that Islam, if practiced fully, most ultimately permeates their lives.

Arabic word for God, young Moslems must not only fast, pray and abstain from alcohol, they must also refrain from some of the most common pastimes of the American youth.

Some parents even expect that arranged marriages, the norm for committed Moslems in the countries of their origin, will continue to be accepted.

The primary instrument here for parents' hopes of passing on those beliefs is the *Madrasa*, the Arabic word for school. The *Madrasa* is a ma-



**Eight-year-old Banan Ead (foreground) prays to Allah with other young girls at the Islamic Center at 3943 West Pine Boulevard. The center's Madrasa, or school, is one of the chief ways that many Islamic parents here hope to pass on traditional beliefs to children growing up far from their families' homelands.**

Figure VI-1: Amira's Artifact: From Parade Magazine, 1987.

## **VII Narrative Tapestry: Weaving Threads of Storied Lives**

What do these narratives together tell us about life stories and identity development among Muslim women in their late 20s to mid 30s residing in St. Louis? Each narrative exists as a separate chapter within this dissertation for a reason. They served to show the importance of each story and as to serve as counter narratives. They showed that there is no one “American Muslim Experience,” or even one common among second generation immigrants to the Midwest from Western Europe and the “Middle East.” Each journey even began in different places: in Iraq, the southern United States and different cities in the Midwest, and no story started the same way. Though all of the participants were between the ages of 29 and 34 when interviewed, they were at different stages of life: single, married, divorced, raising children. They were all Muslim, yes, but varied in the number of times a day they prayed, and which mosque they attended, if they attended, and how they understood and followed the scriptures.

Although each story was unique and on its own stood as a counter narrative to prevailing anti Muslim discourse, the goal of this chapter is to consider what we can learn by looking across the stories for how these young adults have narrated their lives, perhaps in similar ways, given some similar experiences and contexts. Such analysis can help us better consider ways in which educators could address the misunderstandings, positioning, and mis-ascribed identities surrounding Muslims that became apparent in chapter 2. In addition, this work suggests how educators could build upon the in-between identities, generativity and familial ties found in similar circumstances, despite such fearful contexts in which they are growing up. In other

words, I will address the overarching question of this study; What happens when the tumultuous period of identity development in adolescence and “emerging adulthood” collide with a cultural period in which the wider society begins to view you and/or the group with which you identify as negative and dangerous? Following this, I also discuss my role in the study, exploring ways in which this process has shaped me in my roles both a researcher and in more personal ways as well, really shaping and reshaping many of my own identities.

### **Misunderstandings Abounded About Muslims—And Often Still Do**

When I began this project in with the pilot study in 2009, one of the clearest understandings I drew from Amira was just how much Islam was misunderstood in the 1980s and 1990s as she was growing up in the Midwest. As she told me, Islam, back then, was seen as more of a cultural thing than religious by her neighbors, classmates and teachers. As there was more attention paid to Muslims following 9/11 and more questions asked about the faith and its followers, I initially assumed that there would be less confusion and misunderstanding in more recent years. As noted in chapter 2 where I addressed the local context, newspaper analysis and community interviews indicated that misunderstandings, positioning, and mis-ascribed identities were still plentiful in 1999-2011. Rose, one of the core participants, also spoke to the prevalence of continued misunderstandings and fear when she told me about her interning experience in the summer of 2011. As she mentioned in chapter 5, the women she worked with at the health department were very open-minded, but curious and knew very little about Islam. She said little about her faith, but her coworkers expressed at the end of her internship a growing understanding simply by being around her and seeing her act like

herself (Rose, lines 1494-1511). When I told Rose I was a little shocked to hear that many people still didn't know what Islam was, she seemed to shrug a little and said,

I guess that like just [here], and maybe people no matter in regards [to where you live] you'd -- Muslims are all over the place, but I think that people still have a lot of life learning to do, you know? Muslims are here, there, but maybe we don't reach out as much [as we could.]...When the Jews came in [to international focus]... they made a big impact on media, you know, and moved into government and whatnot, and so when we see them, it's like, 'Okay, Jews are a part of our community. Christians are a part of our community.' And now, I don't think people realize like Muslims are a part of our community or are becoming part of our community, because it still sounds like a foreign term" (lines 1513-1530).

Hannah's experiences, as I understood them, made her feel as if those around her were oddly positioned between not knowing anything about Islam and knowing even less about Iraqi culture in general, informed only by news media exposure, drawing upon Desert Storm. Oddly enough, as Amira had stated, there was this obsession with camels. Riding camels, worshiping camels, and even seeing camels was not a part of her daily life in Iraq, but her American classmates always had questions about the animals! (lines 524-531).

Much like Rose, Hannah had another story from as recently as a few short months before our interview about misconceptions and misunderstandings. As we mentioned in chapter IV, a University classmate was unable to understand how someone could be both Muslim and American, believing the two were mutually

exclusive (Hannah, lines 1114-1129). This spoke poorly of not only Geography education in the United States, but also reminded me of the strange dichotomy created in U.S. discourse about who was included in “we” as a nation. As was stated in chapter II, this framing of “we” and “they” often varied in who was included, but was more often limited in scope than accommodating of all who called themselves “Americans” or U.S. residents.

As surprised as I was by some of these conversations, it did help me understand why all three of these women were so vocal and articulate about their faith—they’ve had to be. Despite the discussions about mosques being built and the growing number of Muslims now in the Midwest, I realized that it has been in mosques, through lectures at schools, and in talks with friends who are Muslims that I’ve learned what I know. It’s clear from my exploration of the newspaper texts and from interviews with non-Muslim community leaders that news media did little to disseminate any information about Islam apart from what was said about al Qaeda or Islamic political groups. While one of the opinion pieces briefly discussed a growing interest in Islam and increased visitation to mosques (“Getting to Know You,” 2001, December 11), it never talked about beliefs within Islam. The only direct mention of beliefs was to say that Al Qaeda practices a “counterfeit version.” Approaching from another angle, that of explaining new terminology for its readers was “The Clash of Symbols,” (2001, September 19). Even this, however, gave almost no context or understanding for Islam itself. Here, the author explained the mistake of President Bush using the word ‘crusade’ to describe the fight against Al Qaeda. Those in the Middle East, they argued, still remember the crusades as part of their history and understand the crusades as “Christian jihads” (para.

7). Even the article “Teaching Tolerance” (2001, September 15), which reflected upon efforts made in local schools towards understanding the events of 9/11 only goes so far as to say what Osama bin Laden is not. “He is not all Saudis, all Arabs, all Muslims” (para. 3), the writer reminds us. This demonstrates how little was known locally about specific Islamic practices or beliefs. Thus, it became necessary for these young women to re-narrate the American Muslim story, as they quelled fears about practices, challenged stereotypes and presented images of themselves that looked very much like the traditional American or American immigrant story. And in this process, they re-narrated not only their lives and experiences, but also articulated and refined their identities, painting pictures of lives lived and people they sought to become.

### **Strong Familial Ties**

As stated earlier, Katz and Monk (1993) have shown that the lived experiences of parents, grandparents, and great grandparents shape not only their own identities, but also the lives and identities of their descendants. While Katz and Monk (1993) do not specifically address the experiences of immigrants or Muslims, they do focus upon women and the ties between daughters, mothers, grandmothers and great-grandmothers. This shaping of identities occurs through struggle, especially as women have carved out new spaces and new roles for themselves in a society that sought to confine them. Much like Berry’s (1997) study indicated, the participants in this study have incorporated their family’s United States experiences and stories into their own, taking on many American traditions while holding on to values from their Syrian, Iraqi, Turkish and Egyptian heritages. While the focus on child-rearing in the United States is on creating individuals and independent persons, world-wide there is greater focus

upon interdependence (Dorner, 2008; Chadhury, 2008; Sirin & Fine, 2008). This is to say that in many places, one's strong relationships and ability to cultivate these relationships are valued over building individuality and independence (Greenfield, 1992, as cited in Dorner et al, 2008). This was very true for Amira, Rose, and Ashley especially, as they told the stories of their parents' struggles and how these helped shape their careers and beliefs, often emphasizing family and faith over career decisions. This was initially made very clear by use of Wordles.

As I first began to explore the transcripts of our talks together, I eliminated all of the filler talk (umm, uh, like, you know), and then ran each one through the wordle generator (wordle.net). I was then provided with a word cloud in which the size of the word represented its frequency within the talk: small words were used less often and big words had been used frequently. For all four women, "People" was one of the largest and most easily distinguishable words in our talks, used as form to generalize others around them but also used in contrast to "I" statements or statements about "we." Who did the participants most often reference as part of their "we?" Other words that appeared within the Wordle in fairly large print were words that related to family: brother, mom, dad, parents, husband and family all were somewhat large print words, although which one was largest varied from narrator to narrator (See Appendix V for Wordles).

As Ashley and I had talked in the past about her mom being from Turkey and her dad being from the U.S., I thought that as we talked about her Muslim faith and her life story, her dad's story wouldn't come up as much. I was wrong. Less than five minutes into the interview, I quickly found out how important her dad and his story

were to her and her identity formation as she talked about his birth place and the birthplaces and experiences of her paternal grandparents (lines 78-84). This connection to family and a powerful, overarching family narrative history was most clear in Hannah's story. As we began to talk about her early adolescence and leaving Iraq, she talked about her dad's connection to his family and about her brothers, sisters, her mother and now her husband and son, each figuring into her story in the past and her hopes and goals for the future.

Rose's connection to family related heavily to her parents' immigrant history and its juxtaposition with American life in the 1980s and 1990s. As we talked about in chapter 4, television played a prominent role in her upbringing, as almost a symbol of something her parents left behind in Syria so that their children could have a different life in the U.S. (Rose, lines 289-301). While initially this talk about television and cartoons seemed unimportant, later she connected this cartoon thread back to opportunity in the U. S. and showed a strong sense of respect and yearning to fulfill her parents "American Dreams" through her successes. Rose recounted her parents stories of trying to adjust to the basic, small things that were different for them as immigrants and provided a challenge. She, on the other hand, came to these things naturally but realized how much they sacrificed, and she felt like the best way to honor those sacrifices was through hard work academically and within her community (Rose, lines 2069-2083).

In Amira's narrative, her ties to family were present both in those portrayed as advocates and as those she sought to care for. Her mother was often her strongest advocate in the kernel stories. For instance, she told me that even in the midst of the



struggle to attend college away from home and pursue a profession her father felt was financially disadvantageous, her mother supported her and advocated for her choices, sometimes against friends and family (lines 343-365). Her father, though someone she often “buted heads” with in kernel stories, was someone she admired and sought to protect. Towards the end of my first interview with Amira, she talked about her dad wanting to retire and feeling enabled to help her parents with their mortgage. She understood just how long her father had stayed at the same job, sometimes putting up with treatment that didn’t really honor his hard work, so that she and her sister could have a better life here (Amira, lines 774-784). Clearly, both Amira and Rose acknowledged their parents’ sacrifices and struggles to “assimilate to the culture” (Amira, line 957), and saw this not only as formative to their experiences, but to their identity development as well; they talked about being an extension of their parents’ dreams, and perhaps even the fulfillment of those dreams.

### **Generative Adults Molded By Blessings And Witnessed Hardships**

These strong family ties also seem to have made all four women interested in being generative or giving back to their communities as adults. In his book, *The Redemptive Self*, (2006) McAdams talks about the traits that seem most common in generative adults. Those that seek to give back and provide better opportunities for the next generation seem to believe they lived blessed childhoods while also witnessing others endure struggles and hardships they wish they could end. This is true of Ashley, Amira, Hannah and Rose as they each talked about having early childhoods marked by happiness, but also watching their parents struggle to assimilate or to find employment that suited their achieved levels of education.

Ashley talked often about her mother's efforts to help her and her brother assimilate: only speaking to them in English at home, making them costumes to participate in Halloween night, sending them to church for social interaction, and making an effort to focus on American styles of communication, though it was uncomfortable for her at times (Ashley, lines 230-273). While she found it difficult to articulate ways in which her mother struggled, it was clear that she understood even from an early age how hard her mother worked to make her and her brother happy, and that effort was a struggle or a hardship for her mother.

Amira also recognized this struggle in her parents' experiences. In our first interview, we talked a bit about after school activities and the school culture as being something new for her parents, something that they struggled with due to cultural differences. As noted in in chapter IV, she talked extensively about how theatre and choir involvement created situations where her parents had to learn "the hard way" what responses were expected (Amira, lines 212-226). Repeatedly her parents had adapted to new customs and routines, and it took some getting used to.

Amira recognized a similar struggle for other Arab American parents today, and this seems to be one of the reasons why she's staying at the same teaching job she's held for years. She explains that because of her experiences, parents feel comfortable approaching her (in English or in Arabic) with things that they are uncomfortable asking other administrators or teachers. She is able to reassure them and provide them with assistance that other teachers couldn't provide. (Amira, lines 851-865). Amira seemed compelled to stay because she knows that she's making a big difference for other parents and kids adjusting to school culture and expectations.

Rose, on the other hand, talked more about the blessing of a pretty happy childhood initially. She said that in spite of this, she knew that her family was different and her parents stood out as being rather different, but that the neighbors never really said anything about it (Rose, lines 175-181), that is until they moved away to Saudi Arabia for two years and then back again to the same community. This was a point at which Rose began to understand how different they were because of the animosity she experienced from her neighbors. Her narrative reminded me of powerful the news can be, and how the news omission may have driven increased hostility. Much like in the years following 9/11, it wasn't what was said following Desert Storm, although there was less distinction made at the time between what was happening in Iraq and what was happening in the rest of the Middle East, but what isn't said about beliefs and actions. It's this very omission, I believe, that drove Rose to speak out and to show that what happened in Desert Storm wasn't what was happening everywhere in the Middle East. It was also the lack of information on what Muslims actually believed that drove her to speak out about her faith and family in the years following 9/11, and why she still talked about feeling the need to continue sharing her story and her faith.

Hannah's story of blessing and struggle is less bound by time than it is by place. For her family, life in Iraq was one of prosperity, especially for her father. His struggle began when these disappeared as they sought refugee status in the U.S. His struggle and inability to adjust is held in contrast to her own and that of her brothers. She proudly explained to me what degrees they held, and several had advanced degrees and good jobs (Hannah, lines 702-720). In this, she saw blessing. In fact, this is one of the things that seems to drive Hannah to persevere in her own studies, in living in the

Midwest, and engaging in public speaking at colleges and local universities in talking about both Iraq and Islamic beliefs.

Rose, too, has spent much of her free time speaking at local universities, churches, in Saturday school at her mosque, and with the police and FBI on both Islamic beliefs and cultural customs to raise awareness and understanding towards immigrant and non-immigrant Muslims. Amira worked closely with the school and with parents on translating texts, instructions, and concerns. Ashley, too, spoke on occasion in the community, but her doctoral work didn't allow for much free time. None of these women were employed or funded to do these tasks, but they did so because they were generative adults. Similar to those in McAdams (2006) study, they saw great value in giving back to the community and in bestowing knowledge and their skills on those who might benefit. This need to share, perhaps, grew out of not only family ties, but also a sense of belonging in an in-between place, and a unique identity that requires more articulation than most.

**Schools As Catalysts For Change.** Connected to the act of generativity and these generative individuals, context and space stood out as an important connecting thread between the narratives. In their pursuits of knowledge, deeper self understanding and sharing experiences in the workplace, it became clear that schools were important spaces for identity shaping and change-making. It seems odd now that in the original version of this study, I had focused my questions on the impact of schools on the lives of individuals. Following the pilot study, I tossed this format and approached the interviews with more open-ended questions. The answers to these questions, however, lead back again to schools and their impact. What is so interesting

about this is that schools and talk of schools reemerged organically during the interviews and it became quickly clear that schools were another key element in understanding these stories. In all cases, schools were an important context for acting out identities and for developing not only themselves, but others as well. For Rose and Ashley, it's primarily about gaining the education to do the sorts of jobs to help others. Ashley is actively working on her dissertation as I write this and hoping to work further with more second language learners in future, both those learning English and Spanish. Rose completed her degree in public health so that she could follow epidemics and help prevent the spread of diseases. For them, school was the place for gaining occupational knowledge and faith was something that did not disappear in these places of learning, but mostly blended into the background of their identities, especially as they entered and left university or graduate schooling.

For Amira and Hannah, schools were something more. Schools were places where they could speak out about their faith, misperceptions about the groups to which they belong, and also advocate for others who were misunderstood and misrepresented. As mentioned above Amira had become a teacher, advocate and the person that her parents "didn't have [when she was] growing up in the schools." Her room was one where Muslim children could come to do their midday prayers if they chose. Though she did not share this information openly with the students, it was commonly known as a safe place and a place where they could ask questions. (Amira, lines 148-161).

Hannah represented a slightly different perspective as a student. One of the first places she talked to me about schools as being an important place for her is during her first year in the U.S, and working with her first English teacher. Here, she found safety

and encouragement. Here, she was also encouraged to celebrate her differences and share them with others (Hannah, lines 648-660). Still in a student role as she completed a BS in Biochemical Engineering, Hannah was now more of an advocate herself, outspoken and often funny and sarcastic about what it means to be Muslim, while speaking unity between Jews, Christians and Muslims, hoping to both celebrate differences and advocate for better understanding and support between the groups (Hannah, lines 1018-1024).

Hannah found a friend and comfort in a teacher, and discussed the intersections of faith with friends at her college. Amira created safe spaces to practice prayer or talk about religious practices. Ashley and Rose have shown faith and knowledge in action in their workplaces and studies. All four women have presented on Islam within schools. To me, schools as key contexts for development and places for combating misunderstandings were common threads between the narratives.

### **Emerging Adulthoods Collide With Unexpected Events**

In the same way that schools served as an important context and space for narrating identities, time was also crucial. For many youth in America, emerging adulthood is not only a time to further explore identities, but distance themselves from the religious beliefs of their youth and develop a faith apart from their family (Smith, 2009, p. 150). In the case of all of the participants, this did not seem entirely true as each expressed a renewed and intensified belief in Islam during these years. Though somewhat surprising under the circumstances, it seems partially due to the negative attention brought about by September 11, 2001. For instance, it is in the months directly following that Amira began to wear hijab in public. Though she refers to this

as providing a positive role model or image for children who have only seen individuals in hijab on TV and associated with crime, it also speaks of a particular kind of discipline and faith statement as well. For Hannah and for Rose, who had both taken on hijab prior to 9/11, they could have stopped wearing hijab and explored other beliefs as they were away from home (Hannah having just moved to the Midwest and Rose away at college). They both, instead, became more vocal about their faith and even more connected to their respective Islamic communities. Ashley, who had spent most of her life raised in a Baptist church could have, as a college student, stayed the same path or given up religious beliefs. Instead, she grew more interested in the Islamic faith of her grandmother and in her Turkish roots as well, seeking out anyone on her college campus who might be Turkish. While even emerging adults who regularly attended church or religious activities with their families as children dropped off in attendance or stop attending altogether, (Gallup & Lindsay, 1999) these four young women became more involved in religious activities during this period of time. This suggests that misrepresentation and the need to re-narrate their stories in the midst of emerging adulthood may have reinforced previous identities and familial identities rather than seeking out new beliefs and identities as others did during emerging adulthood.

### **In-Between And Bi-cultural Identities**

This is not to say, however, that the events of 9/11 made identity development and articulation an easy process for the narrative participants. In fact, all four nicely illustrate the claims of Hall (1996), in that their statements about their own identities are sometimes contradictory, complex, confusing, and most of all not easily pinpointed. For all of them, identity wasn't something they came to quickly, but changed and

evolved over time. While one simple identity (such as “American”) seemed to resonate with each early in their lives, this was challenged or cast aside at different points, replaced by others, or just thrown into question. As they grew older, their parents’ backgrounds, stories, and extended families began to play roles in how they understood themselves as well. For instance, in talking about visiting family in Egypt as a child, Amira talked about feeling both American when living here, and Egyptian when she visited family in Egypt. The difficulty for her came when she began hearing mixed messages; she heard messages of belonging, being included in “one of us”, but then was ridiculed for incorrect Arabic pronunciations with phrases like “You’re just too American!” She then expressed feelings of in-betweenness and disconnection from both groups (Amira, lines 73-85).

Ashley, who had grown up in churches in the south and attended with her whole family, talked about a jarring moment for her during adolescence that helped shape her identity. Sitting in church, she heard a pastor exclaim that Jews and Muslims wouldn’t get into heaven. As she reflected on her Muslim grandmother who, at the time, was in her nineties and had never missed a prayer that she could remember, took care of others, and had a good heart, Ashley just couldn’t accept this statement. She couldn’t believe that God wouldn’t accept her or her grandmother. She no longer felt a sense of belonging, either at that church or within the community, and refused to turn her back on her family because of a difference in faith. She had to sit and think for awhile and ask herself about what she did believe, which then led her towards a deeper understanding and pursuit of Islamic faith (Ashley, lines 453-474).



It's a clear moment in time here, where Ashley begins her counter narrative and illustrates a growing understanding of the complexities found in human identities, much like the ones Hall (1996) argues exist. I believe, however, that the truth is found a bit deeper than this, when she and Amira realize and articulate the fact that their identities cannot be pinpointed and defined by outer society; the identity definitions and understanding must come from within.

Hannah was quick to articulate counter narratives to the stereotypical identities placed upon Arab Americans and Muslims that I didn't hear voiced as much by any of the others, as she kept telling me that not only was she okay with who she was, but also she had no trouble poking fun at that identity and letting others poke fun at her. She had no problem with it because she was proud of who she was and that road she had traveled to reach that point. While she wasn't okay with being compared with Sadaam, she understood that that was the only person many Americans knew from Iraq, and that she could set them straight by talking about other Iraqis and her own experiences (Hannah, lines 1010-1038).

Hannah understood that some of the images and stereotypes about who Muslims and Iraqis were come from news and media, but that the best way to present a counter-narrative was in these lived-in spaces; the spaces where she "hung out" with people on campus and had begun to see the opposition between the dominant narrative and her own counter narrative. This, in turn, not only allowed her to live a more complex identity, but also opened a meta-awareness in those she encountered, helping them think about greater complexities in their own identities and the world around them. Hannah goes on to explain places she's most often encountered (and where she seeks to

counter) these misperceptions about her and what they are. She talks about working in international student groups and at events, trying to help others understand the differences between Muslims, Arabs, and Middle Easterners. While there is some overlap of identities in places, they do not mean the same thing. (Hannah, lines 1063-1078)

In sharing a draft of this chapter with participants, Ashley told me that she resonated strongly with Hannah's statements above, especially as the only narrative participant who does not identify as an Arab American Muslim. "Similarly, many Americans think that Turkish people are Arab simply because they are Muslim. People often ask me if we speak Arabic in Turkey and I explain that we have borrowed many words and concepts from Arabic but Turkish is a completely different language. Overall, Turkish people and Arab people share a powerful connection through religion but these are two distinct ethnic groups that speak different languages." (Ashley, personal correspondence).

**Race as a complex construct.** For Rose, Hannah and Amira especially, the issues of race and how they identified their ethnic identities were very complex. While the same could be said of Ashley in relationship to her Turkish identity being distinct and different from an Arab identity, she was also comfortable with being identified simply as "Caucasian" or "American." This simplistic approach was one not accepted by the other three participants. This was made clear in their answers to my question about census data. One of the questions I asked all of the participants that didn't end up playing a part in the life stories, but that brought up important issues of identity was "How do you identify yourself on the census when they ask about race?" Rose's nearly

four minute explanation was one that was both somewhat humorous in her approach and incredibly thoughtful, showing that she'd given a lot more thought to this question over time than I ever had:

I mean, if it had an option for "Middle Eastern," I would definitely put that down because when I think of White, I think of European, and so sometimes when I'm writing you know, put those bubbles, I'm like, "why?" I try to avoid as much as possible. I feel like it's a misrepresentation.

(Rose, excerpted from lines 2202-2254).

Again, this echoes findings from chapter two where misunderstandings and misascribing of identities, especially in relationship to Arab-American and/or Muslim identities, were so prevalent. Perhaps my surprise at the detailed thought Rose gives to this and the ways in which Hannah passionately argues the differences between Arab, Middle Eastern and Muslim when she presents on her faith has to do with my own privileged background. As a white researcher, I have to admit to giving the 'race' question only a passing thought each time I fill out one of those questions. Though I'll admit that I've never thought of "White" as a race, I've just written the question off as somewhat trivial and unimportant to how I identify myself. Clearly for Hannah and Rose and Amira, it's much more, and has played a part in self-understanding and identity articulation for them.

### **Researcher As Participant: Identity Development In Process**

In the midst of research and writing, another narrative inquiry researcher challenged me to think about "the ways in which these stories and this process has shaped you and your identity/identities." I believe that some of these are easier than

others to articulate and more clearly connected to the topic of Arab American Muslims. First and foremost what comes to mind is that hijab in America, as well as body covering, has come to embody empowerment rather than represent a form of subjugation. During my first few interviews, I rarely gave thought to what I was wearing. As time went on, I found myself more self conscious about the cut of my shirt or pants, hoping that I was not offending any of my participants.

Reflecting on this concern, however, I realized that I was wearing clothing that was in style and the cut was often more modest than what most of the female U.S. population was wearing, and yet I felt exposed and embarrassed. I began to understand the draw of long sleeves, long pants or skirt and hijab. It meant that these women not only were less susceptible to being treated as sexual objects, but that they drew attention in another way; they were set apart by their head coverings and almost immediately recognized as Muslim. While not all Muslims wear head coverings, those who do have an outward sign of an inward faith, which is incredibly empowering thing in my mind, to be noticed first as a believer and then possibly second as a woman instead of the other way around. As I spoke with them and wrote with them, I began to think as Amira had; These are ‘regular’ women who are not terribly conservative in their religious beliefs, but chose to take on hijab and modest clothing as something that seemed to empower them as women and publicly display their faith as well.

One very profound way I’ve been impacted by the stories and lives of these women is in my approach to research writing and life in general. Though I’ve grown up as a white woman in the United States (at least for a significant portion of my life), I am beginning to find that I value connectedness and interdependent ways so much more

than individuality. I started writing this dissertation as if it was a ‘solo’ project with perhaps a few important advisors and participant checks to increase validity of my findings and to allow the voices of my participants to be heard. What I found as I went along was how much I **craved** hearing other voices: family, friends, students, other researchers and especially the participants and trusted advisors. I wanted the stories to be authentic and represent the tellers as much as possible.

The longer I worked, the more Julie Laible’s (2000) words held true for me—I could no longer write about “the other.” I had been taught to be an individual, to ‘stand out’ and to project my thoughts and feelings onto what I saw and heard. The reality was that MY reality couldn’t speak to this at all. I’d barely given a passing thought to those little bubbles on the census, and this shaped my identity very little. White represented privilege, little challenge, and though I’d been harassed at first when I moved from Canada to the U.S. as a middle-schooler, it wasn’t something I had to answer questions about for years and years like Amira and Hannah.

More so, while roots matter in my family as we talk about the generations of ministers that have come before and while I was blessed to grow up knowing my great grandparents and hearing their stories from The Great Depression, I never really thought of those stories as part of my own story until I spoke more with Rose, Hannah, Amira, and Ashley. Their parents and grandparents stories were so present in their own that it made me long for a better understanding and connection with the life stories of my extended family.

This realization of connectedness reminded me of something else I’d noticed during interviews with Rose, Amira, and several community members. "Do you know

X?" they asked. "Well, he studied with Y and is an important scholar in modern Islam." I was then told to look the person up in some cases, or sent articles by the person (or related to their biographies). When talking about Qur'anic knowledge, they referenced a well-known scholar's interpretations. I was recently talking with my advisor on a similar topic, dealing with our own program and the perception that we live in a metropolitan area with three major universities and where we study and work is seen as the "back up school." She reminded me that, " I studied under X and Y, who studied under Z and T, who studied with A and hopefully, in the end, its this chain of scholarship that matters." While knowledge itself is important to doctoral studies, far more important seems to be the chain of scholarship and the way in which the story and method is passed down from generation to generation. In our narrative, those we learn from and their approaches to research and to stories tell just as much about our world lens as the story itself.

When asked about people other than their families who impacted their identities, Amira, Rose and Hannah all immediately listed teachers. Teachers of faith and Qur'an, teachers of English language skills and teachers of music, but all were influential in their lives within particular disciplines. I think the most important thing I drew out of this revelation is something I've said before, but in a different light. As I have said before, our stories intertwine and overlap and our lives end but the stories continue. What I'd never thought about was the importance of previous knowledge and methods coloring those stories in such a way that they flow so nicely together, often in ways that people listen to you and then say, "hey, you're Brian Hartley's daughter, aren't you?" Or, "You attended Jean Clandinin's AERA workshop on Narrative Inquiry,

didn't you? I can tell." This work has made me ache to be seen as connected to the larger body of narrative inquiry studies and narrative inquirers, as well as to my more immediate family and advisors.

Another way this has shaped me is in the ways I think about my faith and my role as a researcher in a public university. Kathleen Norris (2011) stated in an address to the Network in Vocation for undergraduates:

A few years ago, I was at a reception after a talk I'd presented, and became aware that my co-sponsors, the literature and religion faculties, were in a marriage of convenience that made both groups ill-at-ease. During one conversation, a professor said, "Sometimes I think it would be good to do away with all religions." It had been a very long day for me, or I probably wouldn't have replied so starkly; but I said, "You know, Joseph Stalin and Pol Pot tried that, and it didn't work out so well." I'm convinced that having some historical grounding, and some sense of how religious traditions have functioned in human history, for both good and ill, is essential to understanding how they might shape our own vocation, a life of hope and meaning (p. 11, para. 17).

To be doing this project at a secular university is both the best and worst of both worlds. It is geared towards a wider audience, centered on human development, bioecological theory and a particular time in history. It also (attempts to) present religion as important and truth-bearing, though this hasn't always been understood, I think, even by those closest to me and this process. This is the most difficult part to me: to attempt justification of this study to my community of faith, as something more than

just my thoughts and feelings, and to a university, as within the setting, it's simply another phenomena.

To me, tackling issues of faith and identity in a context where academia and research are seen as the antithesis to the unintelligible, emotive side of a person serves as a defining piece of who I am and why I am writing this dissertation. I want to acknowledge that faith and prayer are alive in my generation, and not just among those who tow a particular political line. This is a prayer whispered that faith and intelligence do not have to be separated. As Norris states, "sometimes writing IS your prayer" (p. 5). It's what connects me to texts that are thousands of years old and draws me into a conversation between millions of people over time. It's why Norris and other voices I run across seem to speak in harmony, despite coming out of different faiths and different times in history.

Leopold Weiss (later known as Muhammad Asad), in his journey from Judaism to Islam, states in a bold revelation:

It was at this moment that I became aware how near their God and their faith were to these people. Their prayer did not seem to be divorced from their working day; it was part of it was not meant to help them forget life, but to remember it better by remembering God." (as cited in *Leopold Weiss*, p. 6).

I guess, in many ways, this answers my earlier question about who I'm called to be, researcher or person of faith. I am called, as are others, to be BOTH, or at least not see the intellectual working portion of myself as separate from the praying, faithful (often frazzled mom) and loving child of God.



This ability to weave faith and thought together, I believe, is what I was meant to share. It's what all four of my "core" participants do so well, and what some of the community members have done as well. If I can do this, well, it is enough. It is what I have learned most about my participants and myself. I can simply hope that the prayer that flows from my fingers is as beautiful, awe-filled, hopeful and loving as it sounds in my head.

## **VIII Conclusions and Recommendations**

What happens when the tumultuous period of identity development in adolescence and emerging adulthood collide with a cultural period in which the wider society begins to view you and/or the group with which you identify as negative and dangerous? In the four core narratives I explored, the answer seemed to be an initial sense of shock, followed by a sense of empowerment and greater articulation. Specifically, for all four women, they did not move away from their faith or from their ethnic heritages and identities, but rather ended up embracing them. They sought to share knowledge with wider society, trying to dispel misconceptions. They also chose to live exemplary lives of character and service in their communities, and ended up drawing attention less for what they said than for their actions and treatment of others. In fact, these narratives illustrated a contrast between media discourse and their lived experiences and beliefs.

In this dissertation, I set out to explore the intersection of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000), Muslim identity, Midwestern life and life experiences set against the backdrop of 9/11 and its aftermath in the United States. As I started on this research journey, I expected to find similar stories of prejudice and injustice. However, as I moved beyond the newspaper analyses, I found that those I met and spoke with provided a much more complex and rich tapestry of experiences, stories, emotions and ideas.

Some of the changes to my original research design were out of my control, but others occurred as I developed as a researcher and was shaped by those I interviewed. I started with the aim to interview only those who identified as “Arab American” and

“Muslim,” but found myself justifying Ashley’s inclusion, as I had known her and worked with her for over a year before she told me she was a Muslim. My experiences in working with her and then interviewing her illustrated the contrast between the stereotypes in print and television and the experiences and faith of everyday American Muslims.

Our story, as friends and coworkers, represents for me the power of narrative inquiry. We were able to make meanings and share understandings together during interviews, over artifact collection, field observations, through Wordle design and in the co-construction of the narrative process. This, however, is only a microcosm of the myriad of experiences and voices that speak here.

The narratives, as always, are ‘In medias res,’ acting as stories in the middle of stories and forming the basis for new stories and the next generation. The lessons learned here are only part of the story, and will hopefully lead to further research, as they have certainly led to more questions than answers and fueled a desire to continue sharing stories for years to come. In this final chapter, I will begin with a brief summary of the main ideas I have taken away from this process, and will conclude with the recommendations I have for further research that will hopefully inspire others to join in the pursuit.

### **Narrative Inquiry And Life Histories**

As a white woman, I have no place in writing about ‘the other,’ for I do not share the experiences the same way, nor can my words do their lives or stories justice, and their stories are not mine to tell, as Laible suggests (2000). This is where narrative inquiry becomes so quintessential. Narrative inquiry is about shared lives and

experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As I have learned over and over, it is about learning to listen and hearing that which participants want you to hear, rather than the “themes” you think you may hear. It is about putting down my investigative and culturally constructed lens and trying to see through someone else’s eyes, hear through their ears, and feel with their hearts. Most importantly for me, I moved beyond the ‘milieu’ dimension that began the study, and I focused on moving forward and backward in time while exploring relationship.

Over time and as I examined the stories I heard and lived within context, it became about relationships, looking at what Clandinin & Connelly (2000) refer to as the “interpersonal” dimension of narrative inquiry, focusing on the personal and social aspects of narrative inquiry. In this way, this narrative inquiry became about being open and honest about my own life and faith, as I learned about those I sought to interview.

Narrative inquiry methods in this study relied upon reconstructing participants’ words, thoughts, and feelings in authentic ways as well as co-constructing stories together (Riessman, 2007). It was about allowing the process to shape me, as a researcher and as a person, moving the research towards analyzing processes and individual transformation rather than analysis of participants as if they were stagnant beings within a fixed point in time.

I began my research process thinking I would hear about difficulties, and found strength and confidence instead. Rather than focusing on 9/11 as a fear-forming event, Amira, Rose and Hannah told me stories of opportunities that had arisen because people were now curious about their religious beliefs and practices. There were plenty of stories of misunderstandings and outright misinformation, but they told these

primarily not as stories where they felt discriminated against, but rather opportunities to tell their counter narratives and educate those with whom they spoke. When I started listening and co-writing with these women, I began to really hear about the opportunities hijab, or wearing a headscarf, has provided them to talk with others and the empowerment that wearing hijab has brought.

I also began to understand why advocacy was so important in their lives. In alignment with McAdams' (2006) findings, Amira, Hannah, Ashley and Rose saw themselves as blessed with many opportunities, while having watched parents or loved ones struggle in some way. This interaction of both observed struggle and experienced blessing has driven Amira, Hannah, Rose and Ashley. Amira is an advocate for immigrant parents in the school where she teaches. Ashley seeks to assist bicultural youth (not unlike herself) through her teaching and research. Hannah talks about her beliefs with her children and with her college classmates. Rose and her sisters to speak publicly and conduct fundraisers for the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) as well as international organizations seeking to build friendships and bridges between faiths and cultures in the U.S. While this is not what I had expected to find, these are the meanings made in the midst of narrative inquiry and the understandings formed between participants.

In addition to contributing counter narratives and better understandings of the emerging adulthood experiences for Muslim women in the US, this dissertation makes a contribution to research methods in its unique combination of discourse analysis and narrative inquiry. Utilizing both approaches together allowed the researcher to better address both the micro and macro levels, as both experiences and discourses elements

served as essential components for learning and analysis. I first situated the narratives within the local context through discourse analysis of opinion pieces in *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch* between 1999 and 2011 and interviews with 9 community members in 2011. Next, I analyzed these for common themes and found that misunderstandings, positioning, and mis-ascribing of identities lead of a general climate of fear surrounding Arab-Americans and/or Muslims in the community. From there, I provided the reader with kernel stories from my core participants who narrated their lives and experiences, illustrating ways in which these aligned or dis-aligned with community discourse. Using both the kernel stories within narrative inquiry and discourse analysis methods, themes of in-between and bicultural identities, familial ties, and generativity also emerged. I have then concluded that these constructed themes are the ways in which all four participants chose to frame their own narratives, life stories, and identities.

What do these conclusions mean for those outside of educational research?

While the study is admittedly very small and the findings about Muslim women cannot be extended to all believers in the Midwest, let alone the world, this narrative inquiry does teach something very important about life in general. As illustrated so well through the newspaper editorials and in the community interviews, individuals mis-ascribed identities and positions to Arab-Americans and/or Muslims they did not personally know, but had “learned” about through media or through one or two hearsay stories. The act of actively listening has been forgotten. Participants heard what they wanted to hear and there was a great deal of apprehension about the intention of others. If we are truly to learn from this, we must share experiences and stop to listen as often as possible. The woman in hijab that was assumed to be from Afghanistan or Pakistan

was more likely to be a refugee from Palestine, as were many in my ESL class. A woman wearing hijab might also have been a young American Muslim woman who wants to show that not all who are Muslim look a certain way and act a certain way displayed in the nightly news.

The most powerful thing I have learned from narrative inquiry is to keep asking questions (even the ones I think I may know the answer to), and then listen intently to the answers, asking for feedback and clarification whenever possible, and be prepared to be transformed by what is learned in those moments. As Dewey's *Experience and Education* (1997) suggests, the most valuable knowledge schools can provide does not come from books, but in sharing stories of lives and work experiences, using this shared knowledge to build a better construct. Learning should not be limited to the students alone, but being able to learn and listen are among a teacher's greatest assets.

Beyond learning to listen to counter narratives, teachers can also encourage narrative inquiry and experiential learning through providing multiple voices in their classrooms. This is to say that having guest speakers and encouraging students to interview experts in outside fields for research projects greatly enriches the learning experiences of everyone, as more authentic and diverse ideas are brought into the classroom. Combining critical discourse analysis with narrative inquiry can contribute additional value to classroom practices. In examining word choice and styles of writing, both students and teachers can become more aware of their own preconceived notions and expectations. Students can learn about ways in which relationships may be strengthened or weakened through their words and actions. Teachers and administrators and parents can build understanding through creating time and space for

sharing storied experiences. In listening to each other while attuned to discourse choices, greater respect and understanding can be constructed at all levels.

### **Bioecological Theory**

On the importance of paying attention to the environment, human development specialists and educational researchers seem to agree: contexts matter, at both the micro and macro levels (Bronfenbrenner, 1995). While Clandinin & Connelly (2000) focus on inquiry as bound by place as well as time and interaction, Bronfenbrenner expands upon this slightly by talking about the four dimensions of person, place, time and context, and looks both at individual level and at the interaction of persons and groups. This is to say that while narrative inquiry really helped me explore the interaction between researcher and participant, it was bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1995) that helped me think about historical events, individual's ages at the time of events, and physical locations as important to understanding individual stories and moments of development.

While I discovered that participants often had high levels of interdependency in their families or occasionally within friend groups (Dorner et al, 2008, Sarroub, 2002.), living in such an individualistic society also brought about a strong sense of individual identity as well. This was made clear in the counter stories they told Hannah told of her lectures to college students, teasing apart "Arab," "Middle Eastern," and "Arab" into separate categories. Similarly, Amira talked of being a "brown person," and not comfortable being placed within any checkbox on census data, as "I am my own box," (Amira, personal correspondence). This identification of a micro level (choosing words to describe themselves) while also on the macro level (dealing with the societal



expectation of choosing a check box on the census) was one way in which the bioecological model clearly helped illustrate the complexity of identity and independence/interdependence of narrated lives.

*The St. Louis Post-Dispatch* opinion pieces are again brought to mind by these “I am” statements. As so much of what was said about Muslims and Arabs in the days and months following 9/11 revolved around separating bin Laden and Al Qaeda from others by saying they are NOT all Arabs, all Saudis, all Muslims, little was said about who bin Laden, or American Muslims for that matter, were. As Amira, Ashley, Hannah and Rose articulated who they were and what they believed, I find that they were given the much more difficult task of situating themselves within a context, but actually creating new definitions and “boxes” so to speak, to demonstrate a less menacing image of true Islam, apart from those painted as counterfeit. It is quintessential, therefore, that within classrooms and educational spaces we also give learners the opportunity to define themselves apart from check boxes and circles. When we require students to truly think about who they are and what they believe, it presents not only a challenge but a wonderful opportunity to learn from each other and destroy stereotypes.

As I reflect upon my interactions with participants and how well I knew them at the time of the interviews, familiarity also plays a part in the contextualization process. Hannah, whom I met only once through a friend of a friend was more than willing to speak with me, but did not wish to co-write later or continue further discussions. Meanwhile, though Amira and I lost contact after the pilot interview, we were able to resume our discussions later and she was willing to send me some of her own writing

and have longer conversations about faith that I felt were too personal to include here. Ashley, who I knew first as a friend and coworker before she became a participant, was constantly willing to share ideas with me, encourage me to attend different events and as we co-wrote, she was unafraid to question my wording and frameworks. While I very much appreciated Amira and Ashley's feedback and challenges, I realized that this was a role not all of my participants felt comfortable serving, as they did not know me as well or had met me through different circumstances.

Levels of comfort prior to the interview and personal contact seemed to influence the course of the community interviews as well. Most participants I had contacted because of their positions of leadership in the community. A few of the community members I interviewed knew me prior to our interviews, and a few of them asked questions until they found they knew someone who knew me. In most of these cases, the atmosphere of the interview was relaxed. For example, as I spoke with the doctor-blogger, he told me that he normally "checked up" on people before taking an interview with them, but he had been busy and he trusted me because of the connections I had made through CAIR (Council on American-Islamic Relations). I tried to reassure him more, saying "I'm a Christian, but I'm not trying to convert anyone. I'm here to listen to stories." He laughed and said, "oh no one will think that you're trying to convert them, but they may worry that you're with the FBI." The director of CAIR said something very similar, and talked about a particular area of the city with a high Muslim population that had been subject to random door to door visits from the FBI. He explained that they had spent time talking with Somali refugees about

their rights and ways in which they were required to co-operate in order to avoid suspicion.

The retiree in the coffee shop, who had seen me writing and working there for months, spoke only in short sentences on the recording, but was eager to talk and ask questions as soon as stopped recording the interview. The first question he asked was “this isn’t going to get me sent to jail, is it?” He’d said nothing of great consequence and it struck me as odd that he thought that might be my intention, but outside the microcosm of the coffee shop, in the larger city area and atmosphere of the United States today, there still seems a strong mistrust for anything that is not well known.

What does this mean for specifically for research in education and other fields? First of all, I think it is important to acknowledge that context and individuals matter. To some, schools are ‘safe’ places to talk and students feel comfortable with teachers or counselors. For others, school is not seen as a safe space and finding another opportunity and space to communicate is key for building a relationship. Context and the individual also determine how much someone is willing to tell you or to what level they are willing to share experiences. Acknowledging the place and space in which the conversations occurred are quintessential to understanding the narrative and the identities I was presented with. The same is true of other research and other conversations in general. It is important not to think about this as individuals being “truthful” or “not truthful,” but that roles and relationships change ways in which identities are expressed and stories are told.

### **Emerging Adulthood**

Timing also seemed to matter a great deal to participants as well. For instance, though all were within six years of each other, the Oklahoma City bombing incident appeared in the narratives of the two slightly older participants as a significant event in their life telling, but not in the stories of the other two. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 occurred during such an important time in their individual identity development for the four narrative participants and as such served as an empowering element in their faith as well. While other emerging adults fall away from faith, participants grew stronger and more articulate during a difficult time in U.S. history while part of a group facing persecution. Due to marriages at the time and being out of school, three of the four would not fit Arnett's (2000) model of a "emerging adult" as they did not put off responsibilities and decisions. As individuals who clearly were still seeking out identities and were greatly changed by these contexts, however, they experienced many of the developmental elements associated with this stage. With this in mind, I postulate that emerging adulthood is more bound by contexts and experiences than a chronological age.

### **For Further Research**

Muslims who are perceived as Middle Eastern are a minority in this city, and yet I chose to explore this group for my study as a confluence of cultural and religious identities caught in the cross-hairs of an angry, fearful nation post-9/11. As I sought those who were outspoken within the community, I was connected with those who were highly educated as well, which provided a particular kind of narrative and most likely not a true representative of the larger population. As I have gotten to know those in the

local Islamic community, it has become clear that Somali and Bosnian Muslims make up a greater portion of the population, tend towards being less outspoken in the community, and are not often interviewed or featured in stories about the religious community until very recently. The public university professor interviewed for this study informed me that there are approximately 60,000 Muslims in the area, and of that, 45,000 are Bosnian Muslims. Most of the women from within this community do not wear hijab and, to most Americans, are perceived as “white.” What happens, then, for this group that is received as white initially, but is ‘othered,’ as Tehranian (2009) states, due to Islam being treated as a religion of color? This is an area wide open for exploration.

In addition, while the women I interviewed have moved beyond emerging adulthood for the most part, they still have a good portion of their lives yet to live and more to add to their stories. It is unclear in what ways revolutions in Egypt and Syria and the continued unrest in Iraq may continue to impact the lives of Amira, Rose, Hannah and their families. Follow up interviews and continued communication with participants may also yield rich information in years to come about those considered part of the later Generation X and early Millennials’ life course experiences.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

“Life must be lived forwards, but can only be understood backwards.”—Sören

Kierkegaard

There is much to be said about the gaps seen in memory. Draaisma (2006), a Dutch psychologist argues that trauma and elation are more likely to create lasting memories for us than the mundane, every day events. Perhaps this is why, for me and

others of my generation who were coming of age at the time of 9/11, particular aspects of that day have been tattooed firmly in our brains. As Hannah said, there were days and months that she could not close her eyes without seeing the twin towers fall. While I understand that my following words will likely upset many, they must be said: this event, in and of itself, is only an event with significance for the history textbooks. It is what happened in the days, months and years following that we began to understand the event and make meaning of it in our lives and in our national identity. Gerald May (2004) articulates this so much better than I could, stating

I must confess I am no longer good at telling the difference between good things and bad things. Of course, there are many events in human history that can only be labeled as evil, but from the standpoint of inner individual experience the distinction has become blurred for me. Some things start out looking great but wind up terribly, while other things seem bad in the beginning but turn out to be blessings in disguise (p. 12).

For emerging adults at the time, it is what they did after 9/11 that began to define their life stories in many ways. Many of the local community members I interviewed still live in fear eleven years later, both because of retaliation from other Americans and escalation from an unknown threat halfway around the world. The four amazing women I interviewed as part of the core group, however, found inspiration to speak out and to focus on building trust and understanding. They made something powerful and beautiful from something scary, painful and sad. Trauma imprints on all of us—how we view it and what we do with it in retrospect is what comes to define and shape our memories and ourselves.

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## Appendices

### Appendix I: Core Participant Narrative Analysis Tables

#### Ashley

<b>Kernel Story</b>	<b>Age of Occurrence</b>	<b>Theme(s)</b>	<b>Line #</b>
Meeting husband/ living in Turkey	24	Familial Ties	37-75
Early memories in Turkey	3-5	Bicultural Identity	125-153
"That's America!"	3 or 4	Bicultural identity	153-164
Learning Turkish/ "Speak in American now"	5	Bicultural identity, Assimilation	166-199
Grandma comes to Visit/ fear of forgetting	10	Bicultural identity, Familial ties	215-227
Mom's Assimilation efforts	N/A	Assimilation, Bicultural identity	230-272
Starting High school	14	Assimilation	274-286
Going to church/ "Girls in Action"	5 to 8	Assimilation	293-351
Small Towns and SESs	5 to 8	Assimilation	352-366
High School, Summers in Turkey	14 to 18	Bicultural identity	366-405
College and Changes	18	Bicultural identity, Assimilation	407-436
Multiple, contrasting Identity awareness	14 to 20-something	Bicultural identity, Assimilation	450-481
My mom's story of Faith	N/A	Familial Ties, Bicultural identity	484-517
MA studies	22-24	Bicultural identity, Assimilation	524-549
Memories of 9/11	19-20	Bicultural identity, Misunderstanding	557-597
Joking about the stereotypes ("Find Osama bin Laden")	19-22	Misunderstanding, Assimilation	630-670
Moving to Turkey	24(?)	Bicultural identity, Assimilation	706-745
Understanding mom better through second language challenges/experiences	24	Bicultural identity, Familial ties	747-762
Coming into	28-30	Familial ties,	770-843



adulthood, adulthood faith		Bicultural identity	
Developing self-awareness	N/A	Familial ties, Emerging adulthood	953-956
Lost	28-30	Assimilation, Emerging adulthood	969-979
My life story through pictures: Grandma and Hajj	23	Bicultural identity, Familial ties	982-1013
My dad	N/A	Bicultural identity, Familial ties	1026-1035
My Wedding	28	Familial ties	1040-1056
Graduate work in the Midwest: You can take the girl outta Georgia...	28-30	Bicultural identity, Assimilation, Emerging adulthood	1072-1098
My uncle in Turkey	N/A	Bicultural identity, Familial ties	1123-1135
Pictures of my cousin and my brother	18-22	Bicultural identity, Familial ties	1137-1168

### Hannah

<b>Kernel Story</b>	<b>Age of Occurrence</b>	<b>Theme(s)</b>	<b>Line #</b>
My prayer mat	7 to 12	Familial ties, in-between identity	010-37
Egyptian Plate bought at a Jordinian Bazaar	20-21	Familial ties, Bicultural identity	38-50
My two boys	26 - 33	Familial ties	51-63
Leaving Iraq with the clothes on our backs	12 or 13	Familial ties, Bicultural identity, Assimilation	73-101
Let me tell you my dad's story	N/A	Familial ties, Assimilation (counter Assimilation)	101-133
Moving around the U.S.	13 to 18	Bicultural identity, Assimilation	135-146
Meeting my husband/Coming to the Midwest	21	Familial ties, Assimilation	146-182

Dust everywhere and socially distant neighbors	21-33	Assimilation, in-between Identity	199-222
"other " identity/ "I don't know how that works"	N/A	In-between identity	243-282
My refugee status	12 to 33	in-between identity, Assimilation	297-318
My mom's education experience	N/A	Familial ties, Generativity	349-353
Early childhood friends	7 to 12	Familial ties, Generativity	362-368
A student and popular in Iraq	7 to 12	Assimilation, in-between identity	374-381
Education now, pressure from brothers and sisters	20 to 30	Familial ties, in-between identity	383-437
Transitions from Iraq to culture shock in Paris and Texas	12 to 13	In-between Identity, Assimilation	468-491
Culture shock over pregnant teens	14 to 18	Bicultural identity, Assimilation	492-507
Being Muslim in Michigan	14 to 18	Bicultural identity, Assimilation	520-544
"That's how I was born, so I have to live with it...I have to be proud of it"	15 to 16	Bicultural identity, Assimilation	544-563
"I didn't ask to be Arab, I just got lucky" banner	15 to 16	Bicultural identity, Assimilation	563-573
Becoming more open, outspoken about Muslim beliefs	15 to 16	Bicultural identity, Generativity	585-611
Influential people: Lebanese friend in High school	15 to 16	Bicultural identity,	632-647
Influential people: My first English (ESL) teacher	12 to 13	Assimilation, Generativity (reflections)	647-660
Reflections on a blessed childhood, father's difficult transition as refugee	12 to 20	Familial ties, Generativity (reflections)	674-707
My mother and my brothers, "for us, it was okay"	N/A	Familial ties, Bicultural identity	713-726
My country is like a dream to me	N/A	In-between identity, Assimilation	727-732
"Americanized" and "lost in-between"	N/A	In-between identity,	733-742

		Assimilation	
My husband's story of immigration and transitions	N/A	Familial ties, In-between identity	745-782
Recounting 9/11 events: Teaching Preschool	22 to 23	In-between identity, Assimilation	789-805
Reflecting on Oklahoma City bombing: "Please don't be like that!"	16 to 22	In-between identity, Assimilation, Misunderstanding	806-818
"What does this mean?"	22 to 23	Bicultural identity, Assimilation, Misunderstanding	818-841
"What really got to me...."	22 to 23	Misunderstanding, In-between identity	843-853
Encountering Misunderstanding/public confrontations	N/A	Misunderstanding	878-919
Leaving the preschool: "I'm not doing this anymore"	22 to 23	Misunderstanding	919-943
Bonding over boys' stories: young sons with ADHD	33	Familial ties, Assimilation	961-986
Sons' experiences in a post-9/11 world	26 to 33	Familial ties, Assimilation	989-996
Making jokes of the stereotypes at school	26 to 33	Bicultural identity, Assimilation, Misunderstanding	1002-1016
I tell my friends...who I am	26 to 33	Generativity, Bicultural identity	1018-1030
Sadaam "stabbed Islam in the back"	N/A	Misunderstanding, Assimilation	1037-1053
Sharing my story at school	26 to 33	Generativity, Bicultural identity	1063-1077
My friend from Iran	N/A	Misunderstanding	1078-1090
"Are you Muslim or American? How can you be both?"	32	Misunderstanding	1114-1144

### Rose

Kernel Story	Age of Occurrence	Theme(s)	Line #
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Just my computer	21 to 30	Emerging adulthood	38-79
Birth and the first nine years "just across the river"	0 to 9	Familial ties, Assimilation	158-181
Moving overseas	10	Familial ties, Bicultural identity	183-188
My parents' background (an interrupting story)	N/A	Familial ties, Generativity	189-256
"Cozy Upbringing"	0 to 9	Familial ties, Generativity	263-313
Moving overseas venture/ Learning about Identity	9 to 12	Familial ties, Bicultural identity	315-347
Damascus and the US: Two different worlds	N/A	Familial ties, In-between identity	349-358
Saudi Arabia as a whole new world	9 to 12	Assimilation, Bicultural identity	358-393
Where to after Saudi Arabia?	12	Familial ties, In-between Identity	393-406
Returning to the area in '93-94	12	Misunderstanding, Assimilation	408-453
Changed attitudes towards Muslims	12	Bicultural identity, In-between identity, Assimilation	455-500
Moving to a more diverse community in the area	13	Bicultural identity, In-between identity, Assimilation	502-508
Arranging a marriage	18	Bicultural identity, Familial ties	513-534
College in the Midwest and California: changes happened so fast!	18	Familial ties, Assimilation	535-562
"In the meantime, ...9/11 happened"	19	Bicultural identity, In-between identity	563-591
Becoming more political, religiously outspoken	19 to 21	In-between identity, Misunderstanding	594-662
2003: Studying in Syria during the Invasion of Iraq	21	Bicultural identity, Familial ties	663-687
Downfall of a marriage	22 to 23	Familial ties, Emerging adulthood	691-750
My first job: TV news reporter	23	Bicultural identity, Emerging adulthood	751-792
Telling my parents about the separation and moving "home"	23	Familial ties, In-between identity	793-824
Divorcing, bringing myself	23 to 24	Familial ties,	825-835

together, and figuring things out		Emerging adulthood	
Figuring it out through volunteering	24	In-between identity, Emerging adulthood, Generativity	836-898
Hajj	24	Bicultural and in-between identity, Emerging adulthood	910-942
Architecture school?	25	In-between identity, Emerging adulthood	945-973
Finding purpose as Medical Interpreter?	25	In-between identity, Emerging adulthood, Generativity	974-987
Decided to go into Public Health	26 to 28	In-between identity, Emerging adulthood, Generativity	987-1017
Interning with City Health Department	28	Emerging adulthood, Generativity	1017-1045
Why I chose to wear the headscarf	18 to 29	Bicultural identity, In-between identity, Emerging adulthood	1049-1097
Travel as perspective shaping	N/A	Bicultural identity, In-between identity, Emerging adulthood	1097-1116
Interfaith tensions and friendships	N/A	Bicultural identity, In-between identity, Emerging adulthood	1200-1227
Sufis and Selefis: divisions within Islam	N/A	Bicultural identity, In-between identity, Assimilation	1227-1349
Important Person: Sosan Amedi	13 to 29	Bicultural identity, In-between identity, Emerging adulthood	1359-1413
Important Person: Hamza Yusuf Hanson	14 to 29	Bicultural identity, In-between identity, Emerging adulthood	1415-1474
Reflecting on City Health Internship	28	Bicultural identity, Emerging adulthood, Misunderstanding	1494-1511
People still have a lot of learning to do about Islam--especially in the Media	N/A	Bicultural identity, Misunderstanding	1513-1590
New Job: Epidemiologist	29	Emerging adulthood, Generativity	1633-1663

Volunteering with Mosque's Saturday School	29	Bicultural identity, Generativity	1666-1684
Rose's reflections on the wordle image	29	Bicultural identity, Emerging adulthood	1707-1774
High school & befriending "the Muslim kids"	13 to 18	Bicultural identity, Assimilation	1788-1882
High school vs. College and closeness of friends	13 to 22	Bicultural identity, Emerging adulthood, Assimilation	1912-1929
My sisters and the head scarf decision	N/A	Familial ties, Bicultural identity, Misunderstanding	1931-1955
My mom's story	N/A	Familial ties, In-between identity, Assimilation	1964-1987
Importance of Education to my parents	N/A	Familial ties, Bicultural identity	1994-2017
Parents traditional approach to raising us	N/A	Familial ties, Bicultural identity	2031-2057
Thinking about college, education and career path in retrospect	18 to 29	Familial ties, in-between identity, Emerging adulthood	2058-2064
Reflecting on parents' immigrant experiences	N/A	Familial ties, Bicultural identity, Misunderstanding	2069-2083
Mom's vs. Dad's immigrant experience	N/A	Familial ties, Bicultural identity, Assimilation	2100-2109
Mom's tough in Syria!	16 to 29	Familial ties, Bicultural identity, Emerging adulthood	2110-2131
Reactions to current events in Syria	N/A	Familial ties, Bicultural identity, In-between identity	2142-2198
Answering the "race" question for census data		Bicultural identity, In-between identity, Misunderstanding	2200-2258
Since first interview: work and volunteering updates	29	In-between identity, Emerging adulthood, Generativity	2403-2447

Amira

<b>Kernel Story</b>	<b>Age of Occurrence</b>	<b>Theme(s)</b>	<b>Line #</b>
My parents' immigration and Assimilation story	N/A	Bicultural identity, Assimilation	010-50
I'm the black sheep	N/A	Bicultural identity, In-between identity	50-60
Experiencing In-betweenness as American and Egyptian	N/A	Bicultural identity, In-between identity	73-87
K-6 experiences	6 to 12	Bicultural identity, Familial ties, Assimilation	93-114
People didn't know what we worshipped	6 to 12	Bicultural identity, Misunderstanding	116-133
Reflections: My experiences vs. experiences of Muslim students today	N/A	Bicultural identity, Misunderstanding, Generativity	133-167
Speaking Arabic	5 to 6	Bicultural Identity, Misunderstanding, Assimilation	172-187
Culture shock of social expectations in American Schools	N/A	Bicultural identity, Misunderstanding, Assimilation	188-214
Parents adapting to American culture	12 to 18	Bicultural identity, Misunderstanding, Assimilation	216-229
High School: "Worst and Best time"	14 to 18	Bicultural identity, Familial ties, Assimilation	237-280
My dad, the control freak	N/A	Bicultural identity, Familial ties, Assimilation	283-315
Dealing with depression in high school	16 to 17	In-between identity, Assimilation, Misunderstanding	316-340
Everything became a fight	17 to 23	Emerging adulthood, Familial ties, Assimilation	341-381
Living in Austin, TX	23	Emerging adulthood, In-between identity	395-434
Identifying myself: making decisions about faith and practice	23	Emerging adulthood, In-between identity	439-456
Studying in Egypt for a year	24	Bicultural identity, Familial ties,	460-471

		Assimilation	
Living alone in Austin, 2001	23	Emerging adulthood, Misunderstanding, Generativity	475-509
9/11 conjers memories of Oklahoma City bombing coverage	N/A	Emerging adulthood, Generativity	512-536
Trying to connect with students over bilingualism	23	Bicultural identity, Misunderstanding, Assimilation	537-543
9/11 responses from students	23	Misunderstanding, Assimilation	545-575
Amira's response: Teaching on Ramadan, wearing the head scarf	23	Bicultural identity, In-between identity, Generativity	591-623
Identity: "first generation of brown people"	23	Bicultural identity, Misunderstanding, Assimilation	623-647
Moving back to St. Louis, trying to find balance	25	Familial ties, In-between identity, Emerging adulthood	657-691
In grad school, "I'm the Islamic representative now"	30	Bicultural identity, Misunderstanding, Generativity	733-742
Volunteering as translator at work, too	30	Bicultural identity, In-between identity, Generativity	744-750
Living at home again	30	Familial ties, Bicultural identity, Emerging adulthood	751-785
Catching up on life between 2009 and now	33	Bicultural identity, Generativity	851-865
Misunderstanding about Egypt	N/A	Misunderstanding, In-between identity	870-875
Reflections on speaking Arabic and Misunderstanding	5	Misunderstanding, Assimilation	886-902
Reflections on changes since 9/11 in community	N/A	Bicultural identity, In-between identity, Misunderstanding	940-958
Reflections on changes within myself since 9/11	23 to 33	Bicultural identity, In-between identity, Generativity	961-973
Reflections on fear	N/A	Bicultural identity,	1009-1037



following 9/11		Assimilation, Misunderstanding	
Memoir writing and sarcasm	33	Bicultural identity, In-between identity, Misunderstanding	1049-1068
Analysis of wordle from first interview	N/A	Familial ties, In-between identity, Assimilation	1135-1170
"Race" for census purposes? My own checkbox!	33	Bicultural identity, Emerging adulthood, Assimilation	1180-1208
Generation Me vs. my parents' generation	N/A	Familial ties, Bicultural identity, Emerging adulthood	1230-1279
Influential people: Egyptian family, being the "American Cousin" growing up	N/A	Familial ties, Bicultural identity, Misunderstanding	1358-1408
Influential people: My music teachers	5 to 18	In-between identity, Assimilation	1418-1463
My artifact: area newspaper magazine from 1987	8	Bicultural identity, Misunderstanding, Assimilation	1468-1514
Times are changing-- Muslim country singer!	33	Bicultural identity, In-between identity, Emerging adulthood	1540-1567
Hajj: importance in Islam and for me	N/A	Bicultural identity, In-between identity, Emerging adulthood	1613-1702
Stories of the prophet	N/A	Bicultural identity, In-between identity, Misunderstanding	1708-1766

## **Appendix II: Interview Procotols**

### **Protocol A— Community members and leaders**

#### Protocol Questions:

- 1) Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?
  - a. How long have you been/lived in this community/city?
  - b. What are some of your roles/jobs?
  - c. On the Census, how do you identify?
  - d. If you don't mind telling me, how old are you?
- 2) How would you describe your community/city?
  - a. Are there many immigrants or ethnicities represented?
  - b. How are newcomers welcomed?
  - c. Would you say the community has changed over the last decade? If so, how?

Now I would like to ask you about a particular group— Arab-American Muslims.

- 3) Could you describe whether you see Arab-Americans or Muslims around your community?
  - a. When?
  - b. Where?
  - c. How do you know they identify as Arab-Americans or Muslims?
- 4) How do people in your community react when they see Arab-Americans or Muslims?

- a. Can you give a particular story of the last time you saw something like this happen?
- 5) Do you personally know anyone in your community who identifies as part of this group, or do you identify as part of this group?
  - a. (If yes to the first part), how did you meet this person?
  - b. (If yes to the second part), how do you identify as part of this group? (e.g., probe for organization affiliation)
- 6) How do you think others in your community/city perceive Arab-American Muslims?
- 7) Do you think that the events of 9/11 and those following impacted the lives of Arab-American Muslims here in St. Louis?
  - a. If yes, how so?
  - b. If no, why not?
- 8) Do you know any women who identify as Arab=American and Muslim and might be interested in talking to me about their life experiences here in St. Louis?

**Protocol B-- “core” narrative participants**

Modified from Rosenthal, 1993

**The method:**

- Make initial contact with the biographer (usually by phone), explain the project (“I’m doing a study on Arab-American Muslim Women in their 20s and 30s, and I got your name from X. Would you be interested/ willing to be interviewed?”). Let the person know that the interview will be tape-recorded. If the person says “No” –

thank them for their time and look for someone else. If they say “yes”, make a date to meet to get acquainted.

- Getting acquainted – Meet the person in a place comfortable for her (usually at their home). You can then explain the project in a bit more detail and the kinds of questions you will be asking (“...I’ll be asking you to tell me your life story. I’m interested in hearing from you about your life – this is something that I cannot learn from any other source. You will be free to talk about whatever you wish, however you wish. My questions will be questions of clarification or for getting more details. At the end of the interview, I may have some specific questions, but those will come only after you have told me what is relevant for you. There’s no time limit, so we will be able to take as much time as we wish for this interview...”). If you are willing, please bring an artifact that’s been significant in your life or represents something specific about your life that you would like to share during the telling of your story. I would like very much to take a picture of that object, if that’s okay with you, to add another dimension to your story.
- Prepare the person to meet during a quiet time that is good for her/him. It is best if no one else is around at the time. If someone else must be there, make it clear that the interview is one-to-one and so the other person should be in a different part of the house/building. It’s best to unplug phones and to make sure that there will be no disturbances.
- When you return for the interview (ideally 3-7 days later), come prepared with your digital recorder. Make sure that the interview area is quiet and comfortable. Set up the tape recorder and test it, making sure that it is picking up both of your voices.

Make sure that the person is clear on what will be happening. Sit close to the interviewee, facing him/her directly.

- Ask the person the following question: “How does this artifact help you tell your story?” If this probe does not yield sufficient data, continue with “Please tell me your life story – whatever you think is relevant.” Then sit quietly and let the person begin.. If the person says: “...you said that you were studying x, do you want me to talk about x...?”, your answer will be: “...Whatever you think is relevant/important to talk about...”. Let the person decide. If the person continues with: “...I’d be better off if you gave me some direction, ask me some questions...”, respond with: “...I want to hear about your life, whatever you wish to tell me. I am interested in anything you wish to tell me...” etc. etc. Do not be intimidated by silence – let the person choose how to tell his story. Refrain from writing during the interview. Only jot down short points that you may want to come back to later (e.g. ages 10 – 18 missing from story)
- When the person reaches the end of their life story (called the main narrative), they will let you know. A typical sign: “...so that’s it – what else do you want to know?” From that point on you can begin with questions.
- The first questions we ask are intrinsic questions – questions derived from the interview itself. “...You said that your father was a happy man? Could you please tell me an experience that you remember in which he was happy?” or “You told me about life up to the age of seven and then from the age of 18 – could you tell me about your life between those ages?” The idea behind intrinsic questions is to clarify issues, time frames, emotions, and relationships that are unclear.

The more specific questions:

1. How does your artifact help you tell your story?
2. (if the first does not garner enough response) Please tell me your life story — whatever you think is relevant.
3. How do you identify yourself for census purposes?
  - Is this an accurate representation of how you truly identify?
  - If not, what would you change? If so, why?
4. When did you and your family members immigrate to the US?
  - What region (from within the country of origin) did they/you come from?
  - Do they/you identify with a particular group in your country (for example, a particular tribe, cultural, or religious group)?
  - How about in the U.S.?
  - What region of the US did they (you) first arrive in?
  - What brought them/you to the US?
5. What is the highest level of education you have achieved? What about your parents?
6. Let's talk about your childhood:
  - Who did you hang out with? Were you active in your community? In a mosque or other religious center? How were you involved?
  - Were there any significant events at school that shaped how you understand yourself? Or how you think others understood you?
  - Were there people that you feel shaped how you understand yourself?
7. Finally, I'm curious if there were any events in your childhood that shaped how

you think you or your family was understood in your community?

- (Probe for 9/11) ... Where were you that day? How did people react?
- (Probe for differences in behavior/perceptions before/after this event.)
- (Probe for discrimination events) ...
- Stay around a bit and assure the biographer that her story was interesting and important to document. Call the person back a few days later to see how they are doing, and keep in further contact, depending on the situation.

### Appendix III: Transcription Conventions

#### KEY:

*Italics*—narrative or reflective items by the interviewer, serving as a sort of field notes section within to ‘thicken’ the description of the interview experience.

(( ))—double parenthesis to indicate audible actions, such as coughing, sneezing, laughing, etc.

< rushed entry into a phrase

> slowed down phrase

↑ upward intonation

**word** --indicates stress

/ pause

: sound stretched out

{ } rounded brackets—simultaneous utterances

[ ]—square brackets—overlapping utterances

#### CODING KEY

word—used to highlight parallel structures, cohesion, and most frequently revoicing.

(Genre elements)

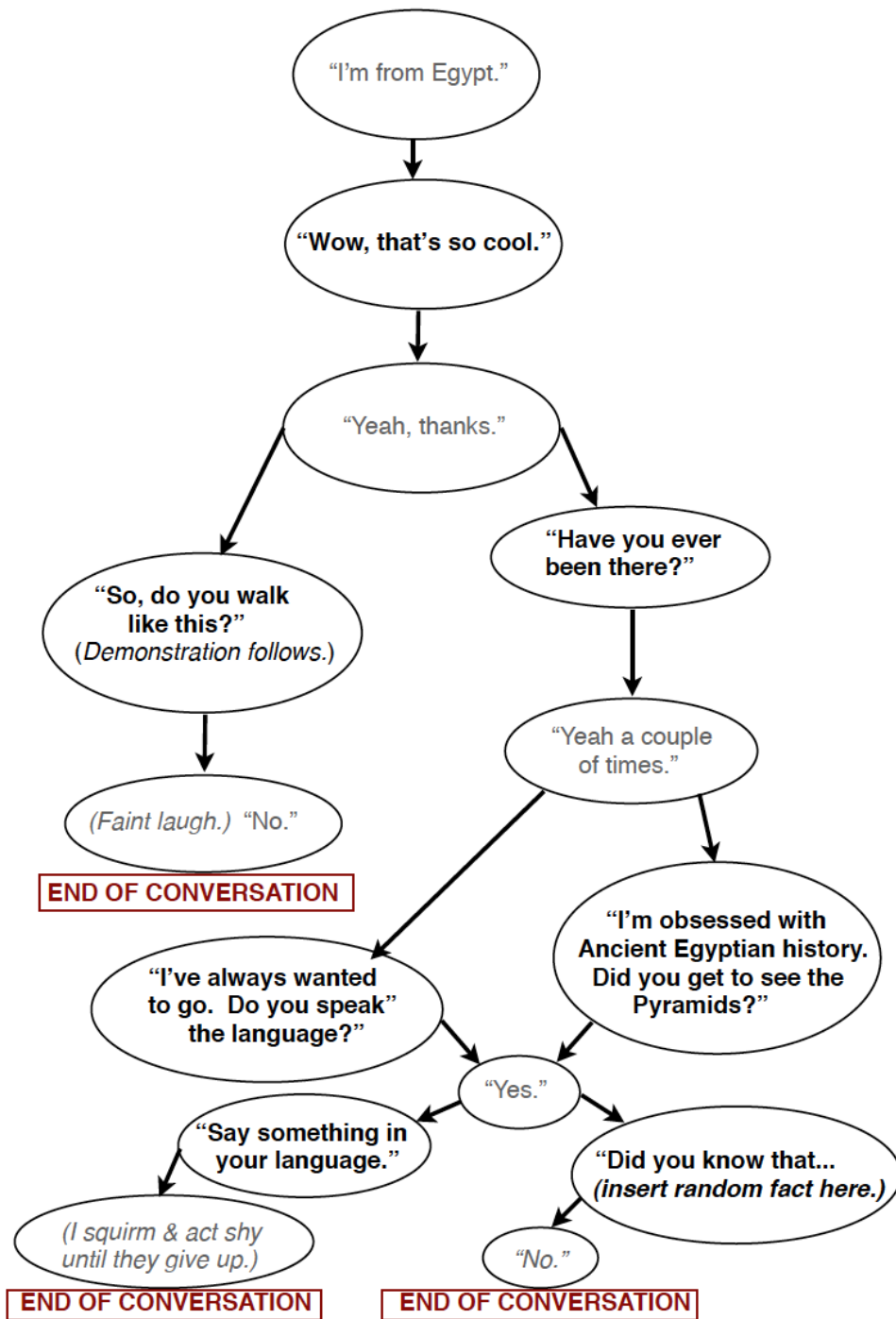
**word** used to note and code pronouns.(discourse elements)

**word** used to note and code types of verbs (style elements)



#### Appendix IV: Amira's Flow Chart

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## Appendix V: Wordles

In alphabetical order by pseudonym:

# AMIRA



**ASHLEY**

